



THE GOSPEL
WRIT IN STEEL

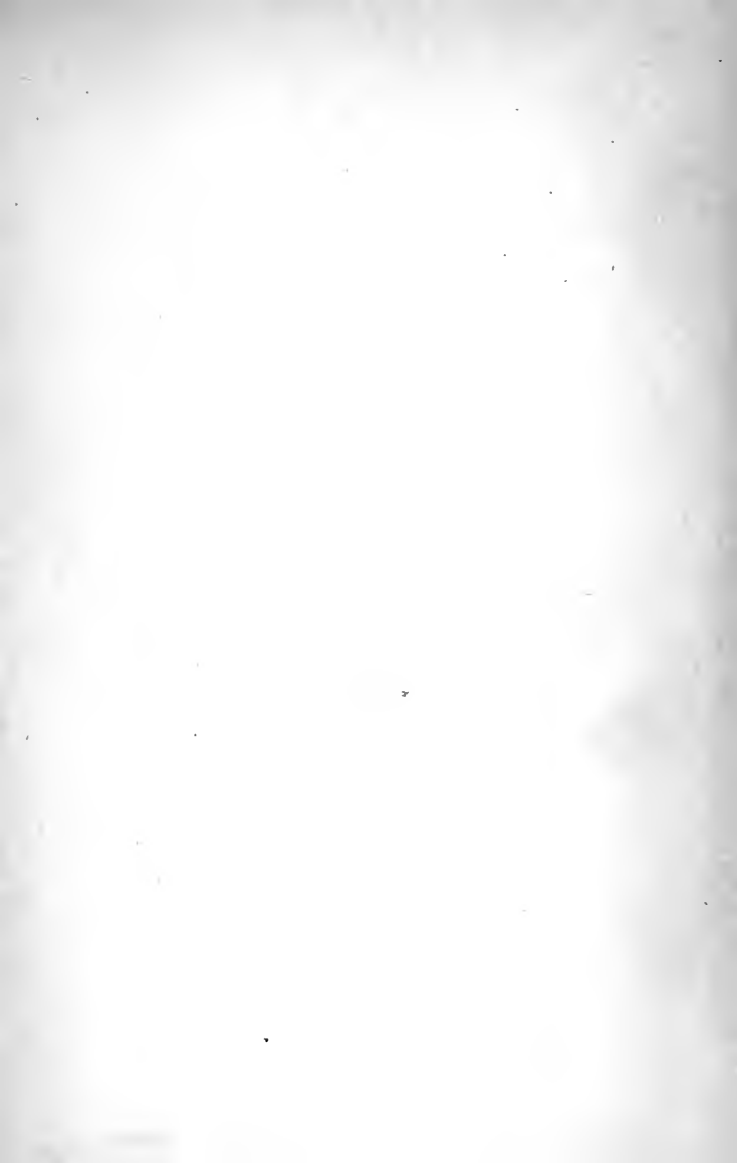
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THE GOSPEL WRIT IN STEEL

THE GOSPEL WRIT IN STEEL

*A STORY OF THE
AMERICAN CIVIL WAR*

BY

ARTHUR PATERSON

AUTHOR OF A DAUGHTER OF THE NEZ PERCES,
FATHER AND SON, FOR FREEDOM'S SAKE, ETC.



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THE GOSPEL WRIT IN STEEL.

CHAPTER I.

SATURDAY, April 13th, 1861. The day the Federal flag was hauled down at Fort Sumter under the fire of secession guns: when the citizens of the Northern States of America—Democrat and Republican—roused to a frenzy of excitement by those guns, called, with one voice, for arms: the day the embers of distrust and misunderstanding between the North and the South, which had been smouldering for half a century, burst into flames—the day the war began.

In no part of the North was there greater enthusiasm than in the State of Wisconsin. New Yorkers and Bostonians looked upon Wisconsin as a place on the borders of nowhere; a semi-barbarous land, where the bowie-knife and revolver settled all disputes, where youths grew beards at twenty, and maidens learnt to use a rifle in their teens. Nothing could be further from the truth. Frontier simplicity there was in plenty, but rowdyism and lawlessness did not exist. Yet a Washington man would have thought the place archaic. In Chippewa, northern Wisconsin, a town of great importance to its inhabitants and of no mean reputation elsewhere, politicians,

when free from Congress, drove the plough on the farm, or served behind the counter in a store, and not one would have had a chance of re-election had he shown the least disposition to shirk manual labour for the pleasanter, if somewhat crooked, paths of party wire-pulling. In Wisconsin, in 1861, the lowliest of labourers addressed his richest neighbour by his Christian name, and democracy in practice as in principle was the watchword of public and private life. It was true that cultivation of mind and outward refinement both of manner and speech had yet to appear in the land—Wisconsin men and women had been too busy for such luxuries hitherto—but education was recognised as a prime necessity, and in Chippewa a good school had been established out of the public funds.

The staple industries around Chippewa and throughout the larger portion of the State were lumbering and farming, and very substantial places many of these farms were. The soil was good; the people, thrifty men and strong—sons and grandsons of hardy frontiersmen and pioneers—were doing well.

In the sitting-room of one of these homesteads, on the evening of April 13th, an old lady was wandering restlessly to and fro between the window and the fire, over which, on a carved mantelpiece, she had placed a letter. A little bent old lady, slight and frail, with pale and sickly face, yet with keen bright eyes, firm chin and mobile lips, in all of which lay a force and vitality which belied her feebleness of body. This evening, as the shadows lengthened and rays of light striking through the window panes, like

long red fingers, showed that the sun was near its setting, Mrs. Burletson's face expressed more than its usual strength of purpose, and Maria, the help of the house, entering at this moment to lay the supper, decided to keep within her own breast certain troubles that weighed heavily upon her tongue.

"John is late, mem, I'm thinking."

"You are wrong, 'Ria. It wants two minutes to the hour. Yet he will be late, likely. No man can think of bits of time when lambs are coming."

But Maria heard her sigh, and, being a sympathetic soul, began to grumble—

"I know what is in your mind—that letter. Good sakes, why didn't you let me run with it when it came an hour ago? I will go now."

"You will go on with your work. I do not wish John should see it till he comes in. Nothing puts him about so much as being fussed in work hours."

"Your fretting will wear him more than all—you know it will."

"I know my own mind, 'Ria. Have you finished laying table?"

"I guess so."

"Then your eyes are asleep, my girl. No spoon for the mustard, no fork for John, a little knife for the meat. Maria, there are some people who will never get through life until they quit minding other folk's business. There—I knew he'd not be late. Dish up smartly, girl. John is coming now."

A man was quietly walking toward the house, the after glow of the sunset playing upon his worn work-a-day clothes and old slouch hat, and glorifying the

outlines of his plain, hard-featured face. John Burletson was five-and-twenty years old, but looked thirty. Unlike his mother, his prevailing expression was gentleness and good temper. His eyes were mild and pleasant, his mouth thoughtful and firm. In outline, the face was square and strongly made, but it lacked the vivacity and quick changes which were so characteristic of Mrs. Burletson. An awkward young man, with arms inclined to be too long, and round shoulders, broad out of proportion to his height, large hands and feet, a man who walked with the careless gait of one accustomed to tramp over ploughed fields, and who rarely troubled himself concerning his carriage or dress.

"I'm behind, mother."

They met at the kitchen door.

"Just one minute, my son, if 'Ria's time is true."

"I am sorry," he said, smiling; "'twas the old ewe; as usual, she reckoned to see Jim and me whipped before she'd get under cover; it came to carrying her at last."

He sat down on a chair near the door, and stooped to take off his boots.

"Don't do that yet, sonny. Here's a letter from Luke."

He looked up, and she saw an eager light in his eyes, but he did not take the note.

"I'll see to it presently."

"I have a notion you are wanted in town—at once."

He had pulled off one boot by this time, and now began upon the other.

"That may be, but this mud won't agree with 'Ria's clean boards or your carpet. Keep the letter for me till I'm clean. I will be round in two winks."

He marched off to his bedroom in his stockings, returning clad in a better coat. It was a habit of John Burletson's never to sit down with his mother to the evening meal in his working clothes.

"Now let me see the news." As he took the letter from her he kissed her on the cheek, and found it wet with tears. Then he read the note, and Mrs. Burletson heard him draw a short sharp breath.

"It has come at last. Sumter's taken. War is declared."

"They want you, John?"

But he did not answer her.

"How smart and deep the Southerners have played their game! No noise, no dust. They seceded, crying, 'Let us go in peace,' and then, while we, trusting to that, stand open-mouthed wondering, doing nothing, guarding nothing, they step right in and strike; tear down the flag, take our strongest fort. President Buchanan will have a heavy day of reckoning, if we ever make him pay his dues."

"Does Luke ask your counsel?"

Her mind took in little of the question in its general bearing. She was only thinking of him. Her words brought John back with a start.

"Well—I guess he wants to talk. Every one talks these days. What we need is a President and Government who'll act. This new man, Abraham Lincoln, is our only hope. If he don't go forward now, the whole nation will break up into bits."

“That is what the seceshers want, John?”

She was falling into his mood; but her eyes were watching his face anxiously, and he knew it, though he did not look at her, and was not thinking of himself.

“They will stand a rare chance, mother, of getting all they wish if Lincoln does not bite back quickly and hard.”

“But the North is a wide place to conquer, son.”

“Washington is on the Potomac River. If Virginia secedes, and I think she will now, spite of all they say, the seceshers will only be one day’s march from our capital. Supposing them to be smart—and Virginians will make some of the best fighting-men in America. I would not be surprised to hear next that the Government, President Lincoln, and all, were in their hands. Where would we be then? I will show you how this idea comes to me.”

He went to a writing-desk in an adjoining room, took out a roll of maps from a pigeon-hole, and spread one out upon the table where the supper was fast growing cold.

“Look, mother, I drew this map of the border a week since. It is very badly done, but it is correct, so far. See that black spot. That is Richmond, Virginia’s capital; and here is Harper’s Ferry, where the great arsenal lies with stores of ammunition and weapons for two armies like enough, and all on Southern ground. I take it the secession folk will jump the place—or have done before this. From there they will march north, well-equipped, across the Potomac, before Long Bridge is fortified, and on

to Washington. There is nothing to stop them, unless the Government is awake, and after what we have seen so far under Buchanan, things are not hopeful. What do you say?"

Mrs. Burletson laughed softly, and patted her son's broad shoulder.

"I say if this man here was secesh, I would be sorry for the North, but as he is not, spite of the arms and President Buchanan and all, I do not fear for the Union while it has such men as you. Though how you get to know what you do, John, is wonderful to me. There—I said it before."

John rolled up his map.

"It is easy to get books and read them. But I am keeping supper standing. Mother, you should check me when I forget you so."

"It takes me all my time to make you think of aught else, my dear. You will now be off to Luke. He expects you to supper."

John sat down and sharpened the carving-knife.

"It is not likely that you are going to eat alone. What is this? Beef. 'Ria has cooked it well to-night. You must have a slice."

"I could not eat meat this time of day."

"You had none at noon, and the doctor said nourishment was what you needed. Try it, mother, or I will leave mine alone, and I want my steak bad."

She laughed and yielded, and for a few minutes they eat silently, John absent and thoughtful, his mother watching him.

"John," she said suddenly, "what will folk do about this?"

“Volunteer—I should guess. The militia will be called out, but that will not be enough—not near enough.”

He frowned as he spoke, and his mother’s lips tightened as if in pain.

“You mean that men—men working in farms and elsewhere—would ’list and serve in the army. Aye, they will do so, the brave ones. And it is right”—her voice deepened in tone and strength—“the men who hesitated for the sake of those they would leave, when the country needed they should go, would be cowards, and none of their friends would hold them back. I hope that all the boys will volunteer round here.”

“You may depend on that,” he said, thrusting his plate from him, though it was still half full, and rising from the table. “I guarantee half the town will be at Luke’s when I get down. You will not wait for me, mother. Promise me that. I do not know—I can’t rightly tell—when I may be back. And it would worry me so to feel you were breaking your rest. Promise you’ll not sit up past ten o’clock.”

“I promise to go to bed, John, when I feel like it. I will not stay up a moment after that. I cannot say fairer, dear. Mebbe you will not get home at all to-night. Why should you? Yet, if it could be so fixed, will you come? Of course they will want you there, your place is not at home these times. To-morrow I hope you will be on the way to Washington. But, to-night—well, never mind.”

Her voice broke at the last, and she paused to

steady it. The absent look left John's face in an instant, and he took her in his arms.

"Mother, what is to do with you? I do believe you think they'll give me command of a regiment at least. Bless you, they will not want such as me, except to carry a musket when the time comes. There are more of my kind, and better, in the North than blackberries on the bushes. If I go—and I have not thought of that yet—it will be as a private, when I have learnt to shoot. Pshaw! what is in your brain, mumsey mine? Come—come."

He kissed her very tenderly, and the tears that were gathering slowly in her eyes did not fall. She raised her head with a proud smile.

"My brain is old, sonny, and I am nigh worn out. But I am sharp enough yet to tell what lies in you. Go to the war that is coming how you will, before it ends, if it don't fizzle out in a month or two, you will be taking a share you little think now. Look what our new President was at your age. Look what he is now. The future is yours, and though I will never see it, my son will make his mark upon it all. You need the opportunity, John, to be forced upon you. You are slow to move when it is to your own advantage. Too slow, which is one of your faults. But I believe the time has come when you must show to others the worth that your old mother knows. Now be off with you to Luke's; don't stay kissin' me."

She gave him a gentle push, then solemnly blessed him. As he reached the door, she cried out—

"Mind you give Jean my love, and tell her to

look up to see me early to-morrow. There will be a deal to talk about, I fancy, and she can tell me all the news."

John promised, and Mrs. Burletson was alone. She went to the window and looked out. It was a dark night, but she listened, and presently heard the beat of horse's hoofs upon the road.

"He is loping," she muttered to herself. "Loping hard to the war. And he will be the first in the fight, will John. They will make him a captain, and it is those who lead who are killed. Merciful Lord!"

She shuddered, and shut the window.

"How many are saying the same to-night? Mothers, sisters, wives. I may not complain. But it is hard. All his life I have shared his troubles, and given him what I had; and every year he has grown more precious, being a lad as he is. And now when I am old, God sends him away to this war, and I will die and never see him again."

The door opened behind her, and Maria came with the tray to clear away the things.

"'Ria," cried Mrs. Burletson, severely, "you've been crying."

Maria sniffed and tried to answer, then broke down altogether and sobbed aloud.

"I can't hold it in any longer. It's that Jim Hallet of mine, and what he's gone and done. We was to have been married come June—you know it—and now this very day he's off to town in his best clo'es, to volunteer for the war. I wouldn't mind that with some men, but Jim's bound to get shot—jest bound to, he's so big. Let alone he's being too

tender-hearted to shoot at any human critter. Oh, mem, the men has gone mad, I do believe, an' all for nothing at all. But there, when it's a fight we women may go and take a back seat for ever, an' stay there."

Maria, being very breathless, stopped at this point, and expected a severe reprimand, for she knew that her mistress hated display of emotion. To the girl's astonishment, Mrs. Burletson wiped her own eyes and kissed her.

"My dear, go, clear these dishes away, then bring your work and sit in this room with me. You are not the only woman, 'Ria, by many, young and old, to curse the war to-night."

CHAPTER II.

CHIPPEWA TOWN was full to overflowing when John Burletson rode in at nine o'clock. Men and women walked to and fro in restless excitement, or stood about in groups listening to some eager talker who thought he had important news to tell. Scraps of startling intelligence caught John's ears as he steered his impatient horse among the crowd, and many of the people hailed him by name, and called upon him to stop. But he said he had not time, and pressed on at the best speed he might into the centre of the town, where stood Luke Selby's store, the largest building in the place.

In country towns in the Western States it is to the store—when the store-keeper knows his business—that every one goes for reliable news during crises in public affairs. There will be found the best minds and the shrewdest heads in the district. In Chippewa this was more the case than elsewhere, for Luke Selby knew his business well, and no town meeting, religious, social, or political, was complete without his presence, generally as chairman. All news, from the birth of the Senator's last baby to a telegram from Washington, reached Luke before it came to any other man. No action affecting the interests of Chip-

pewa was ever taken without a word, or many words, from him. To-night his store was lighted up and crammed from end to end with a seething mass of men. No goods were to be seen. Every barrel and keg and box formed the seat of one or more persons. There was not standing room for a fly upon his counters; and the body of the store, cleared of all goods, was black with people, who clustered like a swarm of disturbed bees upon the platform outside, and overflowed into the street itself. Everywhere arose the noise and confusion of tongues, for an American crowd—until the speech-making begins—is the least silent of human congregations; and all talked at once, discussing, haranguing, prophesying, arguing. John, after hitching his horse to a post behind the store, wondered, as he began to make his way slowly up the platform steps, whether he would ever get to Luke at all. But no sooner was his face seen by the crowd than his name was passed from lip to lip, speedily reaching the store-keeper's ears at the other end of the room. Luke Selby was seated at a table on a small raised platform. He was in his shirt-sleeves, writing down a list of names upon a sheet of paper. When he heard of John's arrival he threw down his pen with a muttered "At last," stepped to the edge of the platform, and shouted with a voice that resounded above all the babel of tongues,

"John—John Buletson, come up here! Make room for him, good folk, make room! You boys of the army, straighten out! 'Tention: eyes right: dress: sa-lute!" the words—spoken on the spur of

the moment—coming with the full force of his lungs. He was answered by a cheer, and then, with one of those common impulses which seize a crowd at such times, every man stepped closer to his neighbour, a narrow lane was made from the door to the platform, and John, to his unspeakable astonishment, found himself walking past neighbours and friends as if he were a public character. Luke wrung him by the hand and pulled him on to the platform, while the crowd fell silent, expecting a speech.

“Welcome, dear friend, right welcome!” cried the store-keeper, in a loud voice. “I have to inform you, John, that you have been elected to the command of the first company of the Chippewa volunteers—Soldiers”—turning to the crowd—“give Captain John P. Burletson three big thunderin’ cheers.”

He slapped John on the shoulder, and then led the shouts which followed.

John stood dazed and bewildered. When the cheering was over, and the crowd began to talk again, he roused himself.

“Now, tell me what this means.”

“You saw my letter?”

“Well?”

“Read this.”

It was a telegram from the Governor of Wisconsin calling for volunteers.

Luke watched John keenly, and smiled as he saw the round shoulders straighten and the strong face flush.

“Lincoln’s awake, then?”

"Seems so; and you were right—we just as wrong. I don't forget that now."

He referred to arguments in the past, when John, who had prophesied war, had stood alone against all his friends.

"How do the Democrats shape?"

"On our side, every one. Even old Enos Haines, who has three brothers down South, is tearing mad to fight. There are no Democrats here. We're all Union men. Let me tell you, boy, this is going to be the biggest fighting boom around the North the world has ever seen. We will make the skies crack presently if secession don't climb down. We mean business. No flather or froth about us. Now come inside and see the folk, then step back here with me and give the boys your mind upon this thing."

He descended two steps, opened a door, and pushing John in before him, shut the door again, and the strident babel of excited voices sank to a distant hum.

The room they were in was small and bare, littered with bills and invoices, packets of paper, pens and ink, and blotting pads. The furniture was a table, a safe, a rusty stove, and some wooden chairs, now occupied by ladies, the wives of Chippewa's principal citizens. There was a lamp on the table, by the light of which a girl had been reading aloud from a newspaper. She was now talking in quick, excited tones, so intent upon her subject that she did not notice at first the entrance of the men.

"Oh, it was just heroic," she was saying, "holding that fort so many hours, without a chance of vic-

tory. Those soldiers are men indeed. It may seem cruel to say so, but I do believe we want a war. Our men grub all their days for dollars—dollars—dollars. Justice and freedom and right they don't count worth a cent. It is always 'We must not do this, or say that, for fear the South might take offence, and ruin trade;' or 'Slavery may be a disgrace, but to interfere with it won't pay;' and so on, and so on, until I have felt just sick with the shame of it all. Why, father, is that you? Good-evening, John. Father, tell me what that cheering meant. Is there more news?"

"It was our boys greeting their captain, here. He is wishful for your congratulations."

He laughed cheerfully. John did not laugh.

"If this is some joke you are playing upon me, Luke, I guess it is rather a tough one."

"Joke? Wait till you hear me call the roll of names before I telegraph to Washington. Joke? I tell ye, friend, I have had no supper—no, not a bite or sup since lunch. All afternoon the boys have been piling in to have their names put down. We had a full company by six o'clock, and then I stopped them, and made them elect officers. You came first. Seth Cotton was mentioned, and he'll be your lieutenant; but you were ahead by a mile. Naturally too; every one knows, now, about your maps and military books, and how well you have studied out this thing, while the rest of us stood and talked. I am pleased, real pleased it should be so. 'Tain't every man, friend, who can win the votes of our Wisconsin boys."

"And I am delighted, John. It is magnificent.

I can hardly believe it to be true yet. But I know it is just right."

Jean Selby impulsively held out her hand to him; a small, slight hand, quite hidden from view when John's fingers closed upon it—hungrily, eagerly.

"I do not know what to say at all," he rejoined. "As for making a speech, I could not if I were to be shot for refusing. I never dreamt of this, and will have to think out a power of things before I get my mind quite straight. It seems to me, you know," he added slowly, looking round at them with a quaint, dry smile, "as if the news to-day had got into the heads of some of you until small men like me look twice their natural size."

Luke Selby laughed again, impatiently.

"Have done, man, have done! We know you, John, better than you know yourself. There is a deep, 'cute brain laying away down in your thick head. We know that of all men hereabouts you will be the first to give your best to the country and its cause. 'Tis hard on the old lady to lose ye, but she'll be prouder than a queen when she hears that you've been chosen by the boys. Now we must get back, I hear stampin'. The folk are impatient. Hello! here's Seth to tell us."

The door had opened smartly, and a young man came in, flushed and breathless. He was taller than John, of neat and shapely figure, dressed in dark clothes of city cut; a graceful, handsome fellow; his face full of spirit, with expressive brown eyes and delicate features. He spoke to Luke, but his eyes sought Jean's face and rested there.

“You must come, sir; the boys are calling for you, and some are asking if John has run away. I promised to take him to them, dead or alive. How do you find yourself, captain?”

“Very weak in the works, Seth. You must speak for both of us.”

“Pshaw! My turn don’t come till after yours. You rank me here, man, every time.”

He laughed, but spoke with a bitter meaning, and his eyes swept from Jean’s flushed face to John’s pale one with quick inquiry and ill-suppressed chagrin.

“Come out, Johnny,” cried Luke, thrusting a compelling hand through John’s arm, and pressing toward the door. “You must go through this business. Do it your own way, but do it. Come.”

John, cornered thus, yielded with a sigh, while the others followed, Seth at Jean’s side.

They made a handsome pair, as more than one of the ladies behind remarked. Jean was a stately maiden, nearly as tall as her companion. Her face, serious in repose, too serious for a girl of twenty, looked its best to-night: a sweet and earnest face with deep blue eyes, a marvellous complexion, and a crown of abundant golden hair.

A yell of applause greeted the little party as it appeared on the platform, dropping quickly to silence as Luke held up his hand.

“Gentlemen of the army of the Union, John Burletson, whom you have honoured by electing your captain, is going to speak to you. He didn’t want to, but I have brought him here because I knew you wished to hear him. Was I right?”

A shout that shook the roof; and a chorus of "ayes," amid which Luke moved to one side, leaving John in his place.

The contrast between the men was a striking one, and the audience, quick to notice such things, saw it at once and laughed. Luke Selby was a man of presence, six feet high and broad in proportion, with confident commanding manner and a deep rich voice. It was said that his ready smile and laugh were too frequently indulged in; that his eyes were frosty and calculating; his speech hot or cold, according to the temperament of those he addressed; in short, that he handled men as he handled goods—for profit. But whatever men hinted in private, in public affairs every one acknowledged Luke Selby's authority, and as a platform orator he stood supreme. John, standing beside him, looked the embodiment of awkward diffidence. His large head was thrust forward between his clumsy shoulders as he nervously clasped and unclasped his hands behind his back, trying to collect his wits, which were scattered to the four winds by the consciousness that he had never made a speech before in public, and that he was placed in his present position by a man whose motives he thoroughly distrusted. There was, however, one saving clause to all this—John was in earnest, no man in all that enthusiastic crowd more so, and before the people had fairly settled down to listen the words came to him that he wished to say.

"Friends, I do not know one bit what I am put up here to tell you. Luke has said I do not speak by choice, and it might have been better if he had

written down something for me to say; but he has not, and I reckon, anyway, that both you and he will have to be content with what ideas come from my own mind" ("Hear, Hear," from Luke, in sonorous tones). "Now, I am not going to say much," John went on, straightening himself unconsciously, as his nervousness evaporated, "in my way of looking at this thing the less we talk the better. Let us keep our breath, now that war is really coming, for the fighting." (Loud cheers.) "This war, friends, in my idea, ain't going to be any playing game. 'Twill mean death, and ruin, and misery untold to thousands and hundreds of thousands. For I tell you it will not be finished up this month, nor this year, unless the folk down South have changed a powerful deal since they followed George Washington in the War of Independence, and whipped the British army into bits."

A growl of dissent here from many throats, and a voice shouted—

"How about Boston tea? It was New England men, not Southerners, who ran that war."

"Was it?" said John, slowly, raising his voice and looking the crowd squarely in the face. "I guess not. They helped; but if you read history you will find that Washington himself came from Virginia, and that he was not the only one."

"Virginia ain't seceded," cried an elderly man, with slow scorn.

"Not yet, but she will. And if she did not, there is as good fighting stuff in the Carolinas as elsewhere. Now, I am not afraid of this." ("Glad you ain't,"

drawled the last speaker.) "I hope no Union man will be. But we must reckon the cost, and it comes home to me, hearing that in this town more than one hundred boys have elected since noon to leave their homes, and march south to the war, that this part of the picture has been kind of painted out. Don't forget, friends"—his tone became very earnest now—"what such fighting means. It is their country you will fight in, not your own. Every man, woman, and child you meet will be on their side, and against you. We are bound to whip them in the end, but it won't be done at once—I know it won't. As to myself, Luke says—and what Luke says, he knows—that you who have sworn to follow the flag, have taken and made me your captain. What shall I say? What can I say but that I thank you heartily? I was the most surprised man in Chippewa when I heard the news, and the most ashamed. For, friends, boys, I am not worth it. I ain't indeed." The speaker's voice became a trifle husky now, and the cheers broke out anew. "Yet to say I do not feel lifted right up, until I am nigh as tall as Luke himself, would be to tell a lie. I am honoured, indeed. But mind this, I will not say that I accept the post until I have had time to think a bit. I can't think now, for it has come too suddenly. To-morrow I shall know what I can do. Thank you, though, every one."

He stepped back, and the people, after one moment of hesitation, stamped and cheered, then cried for "Lieutenant Cotton," and Seth came forward with a bow.

Seth Cotton was the schoolmaster of Chippewa.

He was a good and fluent speaker, and an ardent abolitionist; moreover, he was in love, and in the presence of his love, a combination of circumstances which with a vivid imagination and a sanguine nature caused him to speak now as he had never spoken in his life before, and in all probability never would again.

He began by a few words in the best taste about John Burletson, "a true friend, because a candid one. So honest and so strong, that even the force of this tremendous time does not move him one inch beyond his sober base of thought and conviction. What he thinks he says unflinchingly, all honour to him." Then, taking John's words about the Southerners as his text, the speaker in impassioned language denounced "those degenerate, profligate descendants of our great Father George." He called them "rebels and renegades"; he painted the horrors of the slavery they upheld in lurid colours—he had never seen a Southerner, and never spoken to a negro, but he knew "Uncle Tom's Cabin" by heart. He besought his hearers to cast aside all ties of love, and home, and worldly gain, and, one and all, to enlist for the war. He modestly asserted his right to say as much, having, himself, been the first to place his name on the list of volunteers; and he concluded by asking Luke to read aloud the names of those "pledged to stand by their country in this, its hour of peril."

As might be expected, in the present state of the public temperature, such a speech as this stirred the hearts of men to their depths. It was many minutes

before Luke was able to command silence, and in deep ringing tones read out the names. The most moved of all was Jean. Never had Seth Cotton done his own particular cause, which had, on the whole, been rather a losing one, so much good as by his speech that night. The sentiments he expressed so well were the very breath of Jean's life just now. She was of eager temperament, and the tune was full of an electricity which fired the blood of the coldest. Tears started to her eyes as she heard his words, and she applauded them until her hands ached. Now, as the names were read, a passionate desire came to do something—ever so little—herself, and before long an idea struck her, caused by a sharp cry of "Old John Brown—God bless him," when that famous name, which belonged in this instance to a youth of eighteen summers, was read out. When Luke's task was done, and the cheers had died away, and there was a movement toward the door, the girl, moved by a sudden impulse, stepped forward to the edge of the platform and began to sing. It was a song familiar already at Abolitionist meetings, but now to become before all others the national air in the North; and the people in their excitement listened spellbound, with husky, laboured breath.

"John Brown's body is lying in the ground,
But his soul goes marching on."

And when she paused at the end of the verse, and blushing at her own boldness, cried "The chorus, please," not a voice in the store was silent. Every

man and every woman, those with strong voices, and those with no voices at all, joined in with might and main, and sang from the bottom of their hearts—

“Glory, glory, hallelujah. Glory, glory, hallelujah,
His soul goes marching on.”

CHAPTER III.

It was midnight before John left Chippewa. The crowd dispersed after "John Brown" was sung, but Luke invited him to share a late supper; Jean's eyes seconded the invitation, and though he was haunted by a fear lest his mother might, after all, be sitting up for him, he could not resist, and once in Selby's comfortable parlour, he found it hard to leave.

The party consisted of John and Seth, Luke and his daughter, and Mrs. Selby, whose name we place last as she was considered by every one except John to be the least important person there. Mrs. Selby was a stout, "homely" woman of fifty. Her principal characteristics, as known to her family, were placid good temper, and a profound respect for her husband and eldest daughter, which took the form of absolute submission to the former, and indulgence, where practicable, of every whim of the latter. The satisfaction, however, that such irreproachable conduct gave to Jean was tempered by the difficulty of awakening the least interest in her mother concerning any matter which did not pertain to babies and the household. No exhortation, however eloquent and convincing, could rouse Mrs. Selby into enthusiasm for the public rights and duties of women, or the

freedom of the slaves. She would listen patiently, and try with all her might to grasp their importance, but she invariably failed.

"Jennie talked about the niggers last night," she said once to a friend, "until, if you will believe me, my dear, my brains became that addled I could not tell batter from mush. I did not stop her, 'cos it is so uplifting, as you may say, to feel she should be so smart, and re'elly her words was sometimes like organ-music, they was so fine-sounding. But lor', how my pore head did ache! I do hope she will not often be took that way when we are alone."

This speech was repeated, with picturesque additions, to Jean, and did more harm to the fast-vanishing deference she still strove to feel toward her mother, than half a dozen quarrels. Yet, in her way, Mrs. Selby was shrewd and full of knowledge. Her skill in cooking amounted almost to genius, and a better-kept and ordered household than Luke's did not exist in Wisconsin. When the poor folk of Chippewa fell sick it was to "Mother Selby" that they came for advice, and the doctor of the town, a skilful practitioner, seldom found fault with her remedies, and said she was the best nurse he knew. John, through his mother, was aware of these things, and it was a constant pain to him to see the impatience with which Jean would often treat her mother, and he would resolve to speak his mind on the subject; but with a dislike to interfering, and a passivity characteristic of him, he never did, though they had known one another since babyhood. To-night his thoughts were too full of other things, and

under the spell of those glorious blue eyes he talked and argued with the rest, and noticed no more than Seth—who had never thought about it at all—that all the work of cooking and dishing up the supper, the clearing away, and the washing of things, was done by the mistress of the house, her daughter sitting with the gentlemen, her hands idle before her. Jean, herself, thought of it as little as they. Her mind was full of the great crisis. She listened with breathless interest to John as he expressed his fears about the safety of the capital, and she took his part valiantly when her father and Seth pooh-pooed the danger, and prophesied the paralyzation of the Seceders when they should hear of the storm their action had aroused throughout the North. As for Mrs. Selby, she listened too, and tried to understand, pricking herself to the bone in her efforts to keep awake over her work—a new skirt for Jean—but at last had to give it up and steal away to bed unnoticed and unmissed.

At length, when the lamps showed a disposition to smell unpleasantly preparatory to going out altogether, and Luke himself had given more than one portentous yawn, the young men remembered the flight of time, and took their leave. Jean shook hands with each, very cordially; but Seth noticed with a jealous pang that her fingers rested in Burletson's hand longer than in his, and that her voice was tremulous in its earnestness as she said—

“Do you know, John, you have not put your name down on father's list?”

“That is so.”

“But why?”

“I made up my mind when first the idea that there was to be war came to me, that I would never promise to go without hearing what mother had to say. To-morrow morning I will run down here to tell your father what I’ll do—and you.”

Was there a slight emphasis on the last word, though it was spoken in a lower tone? Seth thought there was, and was certain that Jean did, and that there was a deeper colour in her cheeks, a suspicious brightness in her eyes when John mounted and rode away.

As for John, he galloped merrily home, humming “John Brown’s body,” and making plans all the way. He had means enough laid by to give his company the best rifles money could buy. The problem was the management of the farm in his absence. But in this matter his mother’s convenience and comfort was too deeply involved for any plan to be seriously thought out until she had been consulted. He stabled his horse, and stole softly to the back of the house, for Mrs. Burletson was a very light sleeper. He took off his boots before he opened the door, and crept in without a sound. When in the hall he saw a shaft of light under the sitting-room door, and a low exclamation of annoyance and self-reproach escaped him. She must have waited for him after all. He opened the door, and for a moment his heart stood still. Mrs. Burletson was sitting in her arm-chair, drawn close to the table. The big family Bible lay open before her near a lighted lamp. But she was not reading, her eyes were closed, and she was leaning

back with folded hands, looking so white and haggard, that a horrible dread seized John. He laid a finger on her wrist, and to his intense relief she opened her eyes and smiled.

"Is it you, John? I have been dozing. My eyes soon get tired of reading these days, and to rest them I sat a while to think, and so went off. But, sonny, you look scared. Is anything wrong?"

"Nothing—except that I am upset to see you here. You promised you would not sit up."

"If I did not feel like it. That was the contract, son. Well, I did—so I kept here. What is the time?"

"Nigh one o'clock."

"So late? Then you must to your rest, and tell me all to-morrow. Only one thing now. Have they given you a command?"

"They—talk of it."

"Ah, what did I say?" And her eyes, strangely heavy and weary, he thought, flashed with their old light. "After all, though I never hold much in common with the folk round here, I will believe, now, that they are intelligent at least. Good-night dear. The old mother was right, you see."

She kissed him, and would have risen, but he put his arm about her, laying his cheek against hers as he used to do as a child when he had to make a confession of some fault. The significance of the movement struck Mrs. Burletson.

"What's to do, John?"

"Mother, it was real mean to leave you for so long alone. I cannot think how I came to forget you."

“My dear, you were needed by others. I must be your last thought now. Time was when the calls for you outside the farm were for pleasure-making. Then you never left me. It is different now. Folk talk of daughters. I have seen many, and I know one. I never heard of any that came near my son for tenderness and care. But, John, this has ended. I have told myself this evening, and schooled even my selfish heart—and I am selfish, aye, grasping and miserly about you—I have looked into the future until I see it all clear and straight. When you go”—she stopped, then set her lips into their firmest line—“when you go to the war, John, you will leave behind a contented old mother, who is thankful that God has spared her to see the son she has brought up be the strength and support to his country that he has been all his life to her. There can’t be a higher duty for a man, or a greater work.”

“You don’t speak of yourself, mother.”

She laughed.

“I? Am I not doing my little bit for the great Union cause? I have one thing to give—you. I give it willingly. I would tell you to go, if you needed telling. You may be killed or maimed for life, or laid aside with chills in that low-lying, unhealthy South. But you must go, and I must stay at home and wait, with all the rest of the women folk. And now, to bed, my dear, to bed. Thank God before you sleep, that in His sight we have the strength, spite of the love in our hearts, to do the right. It is hard on you, dear, harder than for me. I have only you to give—you have me and another. But it is

right, and if we are Christians, John, that is all we need to know."

She kissed him on the lips, and for a moment clung to him, then closed her Bible and put it in its proper place, and passed on to her room. John followed her example, and was soon in bed, but not to sleep. Every nerve was tightly strung; his brain throbbed with conflicting thoughts. An hour ago he had ridden home in the moonlight, with his mind made up to go to the war. Now, he would do—what? His duty? He would try—but it was terribly hard. All through the silent hours that came before dawn, John thought and resolved—and then fought and wrestled with his resolutions until he tore them to pieces; only to begin again and resolve once more. John was not an impulsive man, nor was he quickly or easily impressed; but when once moved, once roused—as he had been this evening at the store—he found it harder than most men to pause and turn back. Yet his mother's face as she waited for him, so pallid and worn and old, her clinging hands about his neck, and, most of all, the yearning and unconscious appeal in her eyes, in spite of her resolute purpose to efface herself, and urge him to leave her in her loneliness, held John fast, and to cherish her and let the war go by spelt "duty" to him now. He was not long in coming to that conclusion; but the night had passed, and the dawn was stealing in upon his chamber, and still he could not bring himself to face all that this involved. Again and again he would say to himself, "The country can find a thousand better than me; my money will be useful, and the

boys shall have all that; but as for myself—why, Seth is a smarter man, and a readier, let him take command, what odds?” but as often consequences grimly mocked his words as sophistry and worse. What odds, indeed? How should he meet Luke, or the boys who had chosen him, or, worst of all, Jean? He writhed in his bed at the thought of her, and for the time his resolutions would give way. He knew Jean better, perhaps, than any one else had ever done; better than her mother, far better than her father, and the thought of what she would feel and say, was torture of the worst kind. Her nature was generous but self-willed, ambitious, and full of the wildest enthusiasm for the cause of the Union and the slaves. She would recoil at the idea of any man passively standing by for others to reap glory and renown. She would never understand his motive, even if she divined it, and for his mother’s sake he must conceal it. If his mother knew that he had done this for her, she would be miserable for life, and Jean would never keep such a secret. The sacrifice was too great. He could not do it. Then he would turn over, close his eyes and try to sleep, soon to begin again the struggle with himself. But when the day dawned, he pulled himself together with stern self-reproach. He could not meet his mother with an uncertain mind. A decision, deliberate and final, must be come to now. Slowly and wearily he rose, and threw the window open wide. It faced east, and a pale yellow rim of broadening light crept from the horizon line, bringing day with it and action. The time for doubt was gone. When John had turned

from the window he had left his uncertainties behind. He dropped on his knees and prayed earnestly, but it was for strength and faith—not guidance; that had been given.

It was Sunday, and as John went the round of his stables and tended his stock, the stillness and calm of the Sabbath morning entered his heart, and for a time brought comfort to the wounds there, and strengthened nerve and mind for the ordeal that had to come. When breakfast-time came, and he met his mother's eyes, she only saw a slight pallor and heaviness in his face, natural after the late hours and excitement of the night before. Yet, whether from some warning instinct, or because she could not trust herself to speak freely about plans for his departure, Mrs. Burletson asked no questions about what had passed, and the meal was eaten almost in silence.

"What time do you start for town, John?"

"Directly we are through breakfast, mother. I will be back in time to take you to meeting—but I have to see Luke early."

"I guessed that," she said, with an attempt at a smile. "Did you give Jean my message?"

"I forgot it, mother."

"I am glad. Don't think me mean, son, but I want you to-day—all to myself—that is when you do come back."

They had moved from the table, and now John came close to her.

"I have news to tell you which I've kept till now."

"You should have news, son," looking up at him

with keen and questioning eyes. "There was a great meeting, 'Ria said—Jim Hallett told her—and you made a speech. Come, tell me all."

"Yes," he answered, in a curious, low, strained tone. "But there is not much to say. Luke asked me if I would volunteer; I said I would answer him to-day. I have thought a good bit over it, and what I will have to tell Luke, mother, is—is that the one thousand dollars I have laying at the bank shall go to the boys for arms. Do you approve?"

"I do, John. You have no present need of that money, and from you, as captain of the company, the gift comes well. Not many farmers will do so much."

"I had meant first only to put down half the amount," John said, his words coming more and more slowly, "but I reckon now to give it all. I have decided to tell Luke to find another man for the command."

"You mean you'll go as a private only—now why is that?"

"I mean, mother, that I am not going to the war at all."

He spoke in a low tone; but his mother, searching his face with her eyes, thought she had never seen him look so stern. Then her own face hardened.

"John," she cried, hoarsely, "tell me the reason for such words."

"There is more than one."

"Tell me the chief one. Now, do not fence. I will not have that. Is it *me*? Is it because you think I should be fretting about you? Is it that? Speak!"

Her tone was fierce, almost threatening, and she hoped to see him wince; but his face never moved a muscle; his eyes met hers without flinching; only, when he touched her forehead with a kiss, she felt that his lips were cold as ice.

“Mother, I cannot tell you what is on my mind. I will not. But—mother—do not think me cowardly or selfish. Have faith that I am trying to do my duty. Will you?”

There was a break in the firm voice now, a bitter cry in it that cut his mother to the heart.

“Why ask me that, John? I know that whatever it is it must be good—the best.”

He kissed her passionately.

“I knew you would say that, but I wanted to make sure. You see,” he tried to smile, “there is no one else who will begin to believe in me now, or ever again.”

“Nonsense, there is Jean.”

He drew himself away, and shuddered.

“Jean! Jean—least of all.”

CHAPTER IV.

THE night spent by John in fierce debate and struggle with himself was the most miserable Seth Cotton had known in a life which had not been a happy one. Seth's parents died when he was five years old. His father, the son of a well-to-do Cincinnati doctor, was a man of some character, but obstinate, impulsive, and vain. As a clerk in a wholesale store he began life with capital prospects, which he threw away to become a musician, partly because he believed himself to be a genius, but in the main to escape the drudgery of commercial life. He was talented, and persevering with the work he loved, but was unsuccessful, and when he married was but a teacher of music, living from hand to mouth. His marriage, though a reckless piece of improvidence, was the wisest thing he ever did in his life, for his wife was a woman of spirit, and really clever. Her bargain, poor thing, was a bad one, but she made the best of it; cultivated her voice, took singing engagements, and succeeded in supporting her husband and their child in comfort. In time they might have been well off, but one bitter winter Mrs. Cotton was seized with an affection of the throat, and died before the spring. Her husband did not survive her many

months. He had loved her deeply in his passionate, selfish way, and the depression of mind after her death developed a latent heart complaint.

The only relation that remained to Seth was an aunt, his father's sister, an old maid, self-opinionated, dictatorial, and austere. She had quarrelled violently with her brother when he gave up business, and refused to see him when she heard that his wife was a "public singer," but at his death she did her duty by the child. Miss Cotton was wealthy, and all that money could buy was provided for Seth—but it was at a price. From the first his aunt chilled and awed him. In her presence he was as dumb as a mouse and nearly as timid. The only person he loved was his nurse. When he grew older the childish fear developed into antagonism of the bitterest kind. It was Miss Cotton's fixed intention that Seth should become a minister in the Episcopal Church, and he was educated solely with that view. Seth hated theology, abhorred the notion of becoming a preacher, and early in life determined that he would be a schoolmaster. It was a long, hard battle; but the boy won. He possessed his father's obstinacy and his mother's brains; and at one-and-twenty procured for himself a modest appointment in Chicago, and was told by his aunt that she never wished to see him again. He had deliberately thrown away a fortune of seventy thousand dollars. Seth, however, had a natural gift for teaching, and loved his independence. He steadily improved his position, and in two years had qualified himself to take the management of a school—as they existed in those days—single handed.

Unfortunately Seth had one weakness, which was a serious drawback to his advancement in his profession, and in his four-and-twentieth year caused him to accept the offer of a less remunerative post in Chippewa. He was always falling in love. As a rule the affairs were not very serious, for it was Seth's misfortune to show his hand too soon, and propose before the young lady had thought about him in any other light than that of a pleasant acquaintance; consequently the flames of his affection were always being prematurely snuffed out. But it happened one day that the object of his misplaced attentions took offence, and complained to an indignant brother, who attacked Seth next day in the open street with a walking cane. The encounter ended by a sound castigation being administered to the aggressor. Seth's friends said he had done right; but he had to send in his resignation as instructor of youth in Chicago. He came to Chippewa in an exceedingly misanthropical condition of mind; nevertheless, he had not been there a week before he felt that in Jean Selby he had met his fate. For a long time he worshipped her from afar, content to do so after his recent experiences, and throwing himself with all his might into his work at the school. By-and-bye, however, he was able to make his first advance through a younger brother of hers, who became one of his scholars. They were soon fast friends; and Seth, warned by past blunders, and perceiving that Jean was of very different stuff from the pretty school teachers he had flirted with in former days, kept himself in order, and pursued the path of discretion. As a result he

plunged into 'deeper water week by week. In six months he was over head and ears in love, and thought of little else. Everything he did, or tried to do—the books he read and the subjects he mastered—were for Jean. She had many interests, having, thanks to her mother, plenty of time at her disposal, and Seth made it his duty to keep pace with them all. Wherefore, on Jean's side, also, the friendship grew in strength as the months went by, and Seth became in her eyes a most agreeable and well-informed young man.

One thorn only lay in Seth's bed of roses, but that was a very big one—John Burletson. The first words about Jean which Seth heard when he settled down in Chippewa had been that she and this farming fellow were made for one another; and though he had made up his mind that those who said this should live to find themselves mistaken, the more he saw of John and knew of Jean the more the prophecy haunted him. In American country towns, in those days, the love affairs of the rising generation were looked upon by every one concerned—not excepting the parties themselves—from a common-sense, practical point of view, eminently unsatisfactory to a romancer. It was in the nature of things. The lads and lassies went to school together from their earliest days. Out of school hours they saw one another when and where they listed, and, as people seldom travelled much, they never lost sight of one another, and each was familiar with the weak points of his friend, her affinities and the reverse, long before she reached a "marriageable age." This was healthy on the whole.

Lessons in those days were not made the cause of keen emulation or rivalry we often see now; boys and girls did not struggle feverishly for prizes, run hard brain races neck to neck, and lose year by year, in the bitterness of defeat, or exultation of victory—the boys in chivalry, the girls in refinement and simplicity. Moreover, out of school hours the lad was on the farm, the girl in the house, and no opportunities existed for seeing too much of each other. Thus the love affairs of those days among the poorer middle classes usually came quietly and uneventfully, like seeking like. Only, now and then, into the quiet towns, would come men from other places, with roving eyes and hungry hearts, and then angry blood would rise and the story-tellers rejoice. So far, however, in the present case we are fain to confess nothing of the kind had occurred.

In the first place, Jean was not sentimental, and held out an open hand of friendship to both men; in the second place, it takes two to make a quarrel, and John was the most peaceable of men. As for Seth, he was one day in the depths of despair, the next on a pinnacle of hope. As the rumours of war grew stronger his friendship with Jean grew also, and their meetings became more frequent and lasted longer. The day before Sumter fell, Seth had been two hours with her discussing the situation. Then came Saturday evening, and Seth gave way to bitter despondency. He could not, though he tried, complain of Jean. She had been as sympathetic and as inspiring to him as ever; but to John she had been all this and something more. She had treated him

with respect, deference even. She had yielded her judgment, which she had never done to Seth. Oh, it was bitter. And the worst of it was, he could find no fault even with his rival. Burletson gave himself no airs, but was just the same simple, slow-speaking old John, only a trifle graver than usual. Angry and sore as Seth was, he found himself even sympathizing with Jean's attitude toward his rival. "I never liked the man better," he said to himself. "Confound him! what a good fellow he is, how straight he goes at a thing, and completely masters it—swallows it whole, so to speak, and chews it into pulp, before even he talks about it; yet as modest as a child. Thunder! but I will follow him to the death when the time comes. Heigh-ho! what an unlucky beggar I was to meet John here, and what a fool to think I should ever stand half a show when it came to fighting him!" At about this point in his reflections Seth fell asleep. He awakened late, and languidly ate his breakfast, finishing just in time to stroll over to the store at ten o'clock, where he was to meet John and Luke for a chat before meeting-time. As he went down the street he was surprised at the many cordial greetings he received from men with whom he had only been on nodding acquaintance hitherto, and presently he began to see that his speech last evening had made a marked difference in his standing in the town. This cheered him immensely. His spirits rose at a bound, and by the time he greeted Mrs. Selby on his way to the room behind the store he had marked out for himself a distinguished military and political career. He loved Jean

still; but life contained other things worth winning besides a woman's heart. The sound of a voice talking in loud angry tones arrested his attention, and brought him back to the present with a jar. He opened the door and looked round. His eyes were caught first of all by John standing by the table, his head bent, and his hands clasped behind his back, as they had been at the meeting. His face was gray and miserable, yet full of a determination which struck Seth at once, and remained in his memory after what followed as the deepest impression of all. Then Seth glanced at Jean. She was looking at John, an angry light in her eyes, which sent a sudden thrill of hope to Seth's heart. Her father, whom Seth saw last, was speaking. At Seth's entrance he brought his clenched fist down upon the table with a crash.

"There is time yet," he cried, "just time. Take your courage up again, and be a man. Can you, before Seth Cotton, here, show the white feather so? Do you want him to take your place with—with the boys, and *all else*? Do you think you can bide here without one self-respecting citizen among us all to touch your hand? By God! John, if you had not said this with your own tongue, and before Jean too, I would doubt my own ears and wits, sooner than believe it. That you, our John, as me and my wife have called you these many years, should turn in the path set before him, have the plough in the furrow, and deliberately go right back on his tracks—why, there, it must be a lie, and I can't believe it; I will not."

It was a strange sight to see Luke Selby so completely thrown off his balance. Yet every man has a tender place somewhere, and Luke's had been touched this morning to the quick. For years he had watched John; had noticed his increasing interest in politics, his steady way of accumulating knowledge, and fitting himself to take a responsible part in whatever might have to be done. He knew how well he managed his business, and was as sure as Mrs. Burletson herself that he only wanted his opportunity to manage the affairs of others equally well. Naturally he had desired this man for his son-in-law, and viewed his growing affections for Jean with warmest approval. When war became inevitable, and the sure way to win popular favour and renown was by arms, the idea of John getting a command in the volunteer army was quickly seized and made a certainty by Luke, and he held himself ready to use every particle of political influence he possessed to ensure speedy promotion. When after all this he found that John threw it away, declined his commission, refused even to volunteer, it was hardly wonderful that Luke Selby should for once lose his dignity and self-control.

There was silence for a moment, and then Seth said—

“What is the matter?”

He looked at Jean, and she replied in a dry, hard tone,

“We have had a surprise this morning, father and me. Have you come to tell us that business engagements will prevent you from going to the war?”

“How can you insult me by such an idea?”

She gave a bitter laugh.

"I told you we had been surprised. I might have said we do not feel like trusting any one again. I am sorry if I hurt you."

"You have hurt me," he answered shortly, instinctively feeling that now, if ever, his time would come. "But never mind my feelings. I came to take orders from my superior officer. Captain, what is the news?"

He regretted afterward having spoken in this way, for when John raised his eyes and looked at him, Seth saw such a world of suffering written in his face that he positively shivered.

"The news is this," John answered, in the tone of a man weary beyond words. "Circumstances since last night make it that I cannot go to the war. I have told these folk; now I tell you. I am sorry for all, because it will be upsetting, maybe, after what was said last night. But it has to be. When Luke has done I have some things to explain to you, Seth, before I go."

Luke sat down with something like a curse.

"I ain't another word to say. But," with a malicious smile, "perhaps Jean has."

"I have many, indeed," she cried, then hesitated, as she met John's look. "I mean," she went on, with a catch in her breath, "I cannot understand it, anyway. If, behind what you have said, there is some great reason holding you, it seems to me unnatural, unkind, cruel, that you should treat us this way, and give no sort of explanation. John, are you afraid?"

"I am not afraid."

"Are you not?" sneered Luke. "Then I never saw a man act cowardice better. Talk till you are dead, John, you will never convince me, after what I have seen to-day, that fear is not at the bottom of your mind."

John turned on him suddenly.

"I did not lay myself out, Luke Selby, to convince you, or any other man. This is my business."

His tone was not so gentle as it had been; he had borne about as much as he could stand.

"Jean," he said in a lower tone, "have you more to say?"

"I want to know *why*?"

"I have said, I cannot give my reasons."

"Is it your mother? Now tell me that."

"I cannot," he answered very slowly. "I cannot tell you that."

"Then," she cried, nothing but the trembling of her hands to belie the cruelty of her words, "you are not the man I believed you to be—oh, nothing of that man! And when you are in town about your business, remember, you will never, *never* trouble to come and speak to me."

He winced for the first time, then, squaring his shoulders, turned to Seth.

"My words with you will not take long. You will be in my place—a gain in men. The only loss might have been my money; but that I reckon to make up. So here"—he took a paper from his pocket—"that is for arms, or what else they need.

It is not much, but it is twice what I could have spared if I had been with them."

Seth looked at the check and blushed.

"Say, John, this is hardly fair. Two thousand dollars—what does it all mean? Come, man"—his jealousy fading out before the suffering he saw in the stern face—"come with me and talk it over quietly. I will find some way, I know, to fix your scruples off. We want the man, not his money."

But John turned away.

"Thank you, friend, for that; but I have no leisure to talk—it will be waste of time. The money is nothing. It belongs to the boys. Tell them so—from me."

He took up his hat, and without a glance at Jean went quickly away. As he passed Seth he looked him steadily in the face—and they shook hands.

CHAPTER V.

FEELING ran very high in Chippewa when it was known that John had resigned the captaincy of the company, and was not going to volunteer at all. But for his many friends his personal safety would have been in danger when he came into town the next day. He was jeered at in the streets; boys threw stones at him, asked tenderly after his health, and called him "home guard," while many acquaintances cut him entirely, and even old friends passed him with the coldest of greetings. Only one man had a word to say in his favour, and laughed at the suggestion that he stayed at home from bodily fear. This was Seth. His motives were a little mixed, perhaps, for nothing was calculated to improve his own position more than generous championship of the man whose place he had taken; but he meant all he said, and found a real pleasure in his attempt to vindicate John. Not that he was successful. It was a time of wild enthusiasm; old friendships, even ties of blood, were forgotten, and the majority of people, whatever they did themselves, cried shame upon any man who refused to enlist for the war, while those who came forward were extolled by the platform orators and the press as heroes of rarest kind. As for Seth, he found himself

a celebrity in a week. The local paper produced a fanciful sketch of his life, and prophesied that through his achievements Chippewa would become famous and world-renowned. In the same issue mention was made of John's gift to the company. He was duly thanked for his generosity, but not without an insinuation that he had done it to save his own skin. Seth read the paragraph just before he had made an appointment at the Selbys', and was so angry that he could not resist expressing his feelings to Jean. He met with a cold response.

"I am not convinced that the editor is wrong," she said. "No," as Seth would have interposed, "you need not trouble to tell me anything. I would be glad if you did not mention his name. I am so bitterly disappointed, that I would rather not hear anything about it. Our friendship is dead and done with. I could never respect a man again who could turn back, *from any cause*, when his country needed him, and his friends called him to the front as the boys called John. His being an old friend makes it worse. Indeed, I have put him out of my mind once for all. The war—and your plans—are what interest me. Tell me everything you can, you will never make me tired."

Seth needed no second invitation. The first practical step the Government were taking was to send an officer of the regular army to inspect the volunteers and formally enrol them. They expected him daily. In the mean time Seth was learning his drill manual as fast as possible, and practising sword-exercise under the guidance of an old book on fencing

he had picked up. A happy thought struck him that he would ask Jean to hear him his drill. She agreed at once, and from that day forth Seth was at the store every evening, and as Luke was very busy, and Mrs. Selby had her children to put to bed, these evenings were mostly spent with Jean alone.

Jean was not destined, however, to forget John as easily as she apparently wished to do.

"Jennie," said her mother one afternoon, sitting down to sew at the table where Jean was poring over a newspaper, "what is this your father tells me about you and John? Surely there can be no abiding quarrel between you and your oldest friend?"

Jean looked up from her reading with a flushed and angry face.

"Did not father tell you what he has done?"

"I understand that he don't feel like going to the war."

"Isn't that enough? It is for me."

Jean dashed her paper upon the table, smoothed it out with a rustle, and began to read again.

Mrs. Selby stopped sewing, adjusted her spectacles, and looked at her daughter with an expression of dumb surprise which Jean found exceedingly trying. It had not entered Mrs. Selby's head for years to question, much less find fault with, any opinion or action of Jean's. The girl was clever, high-spirited, and had received a good education—or her mother thought so—while Mrs. Selby believed herself to be the most stupid and most ignorant of human beings. Jean, so Mrs. Selby told her friends with simple pride, could talk politics like a man, and read books which

her mother, when she peeped into them quietly, could not understand in the least. And Jean had opinions upon subjects of which girls were not allowed to speak in Mrs. Selby's youth, opinions chiefly concerning the position in the universe Providence had intended men—and women—to occupy. Mrs. Selby looked up with respect to mankind in general as long as they did not "fuss round" the house. Jean seemed, in her mother's eyes, to consider men created to do the behest of women; and as most of the men they knew did what Jean told them without a murmur, Mrs. Selby could not contradict her. John, it was true, had been an exception to this rule, and Mrs. Selby had secretly enjoyed the way he would at times stand squarely opposed to Jean and all her opinions, and had not failed to note that in the end he had gained respect and consideration by doing so. So much, indeed, had this been the case, that the news that Jean had cast his friendship away, and turned her back upon him as on one disgraced, gave a shock to Mrs. Selby's nature that roused her from her customary submissive attitude into determined attention.

"Jennie, my dear, I do not understand."

Down went the paper upon the table again.

"No, nor does any one else; but it appears to be a fact."

"I mean—I don't understand you."

"Me! Why, mother, do you suppose I would have anything to do with a coward?—not if he were my own brother."

"Who says John is a coward?"

Jean dropped her paper and looked up. She had never heard her mother speak in so stern a tone.

"Father said so."

"He ain't mentioned the word to me."

"He said it in John's presence."

"What did the boy reply?"

"Denied it, of course. But when I asked him why he would not volunteer he refused to give any reason. Talk of being old friends! If he cared for that at all, he would not have treated me so. But he would say nothing—not a word."

"I guess I know why that is," Mrs. Selby said in a thoughtful tone; "it's his mother—yet he keeps close about it, 'cos she would about die if she were to think he held back for her."

A blush rose to Jean's face, and she started suddenly—then put the thought aside.

"That cannot be—I asked him direct. He said it was not."

Mrs. Selby looked puzzled.

"I can't heft his reasons, then; but I am right sure they are good ones."

"The only one I can think of is very bad—the fear of being killed."

Jean spoke with withering scorn.

"Well, you know," Mrs. Selby rejoined with exasperating coolness, "I ain't sure that this may not be in it. John lives a useful life; he has his mother to support, and a rare big farming business. It would be more than foolish—I would call it wicked—if he went off to the war unless he had to go. And that is far from being so; Luke says the boys all

around the North are gettin' mad to fight. Therewill be plenty without him."

"Thank Heaven! yes," cried Jean, so irritated and angry at her mother's attitude, that she could have slapped her. "There are brave men left. If one disappoints us, there is always another to take his place."

Mrs. Selby sighed helplessly.

"I do not understand one little bit. Seems as if you want John to be killed. Is that it?"

"Mother!" Jean stamped her foot. Then by a great effort controlled herself, snatched up her paper, and went to her room, locking herself in, and walking up and down to cool.

"How stupid she is—how stupid!" she said aloud. "I don't know what I shall do or say one of these days if she goes on so. It is wrong, horribly wrong, to think this way of one's mother; but I cannot help it. It is true. What can be worse than this?—because I want John to be a man, she supposes that I wish he was dead; or that I am picking a hole because I want to quarrel! I want to quarrel? Why, I would give—what would I not give to have things as they were before? I am miserable—miserable—I mean I hate that he should have turned out so. Should I be so bitter, does she think, if I had not cared so much? But there, it is over. To worry about it any more is quite absurd. If John is a coward, Seth turns out different from anything I had expected. These times of trial do test a man. The heat and stress shrivels up one, but it makes another greater and nobler than he could ever be with-

out it. But dear, dear, what can the time be? I promised to meet Seth at five; he will have been waiting quite a while."

She laved her face in cold water, and then examined her eyes in the glass, and frowned. They were distinctly red.

At the Burletson homestead in these stirring days life went much as usual. Mrs. Burletson never drove to town except on Sundays, and knew nothing at the time of the reception John had encountered. John had made little of it even to himself. After what Jean had said, the opinions of his friends and the gibes of the rest were nothing. Yet her words were what he had expected. He had not realized beforehand all that it would mean to him. His chief anxiety was to prevent his mother knowing what he suffered, and especially to guard against the least suspicion that he had made the sacrifice for her. At first he despaired of this. Mrs. Burletson was an exceedingly transparent person; and John saw that, though she said nothing after he had told her he could not volunteer, she had made up her mind that he wanted to go, and he suspected that she was only keeping quiet because her busy brain was thinking of some way to bring it all about. But, as it happened, a new turn was given to Mrs. Burletson's ideas by the very thing John had carefully concealed from her—what was said of him in town. The news was told to her by the Reverend Septimus Haniman, their minister, the kindest of men, who thought that she ought to know it. He did it very gently; but no delicacy of handling could remove the significance

of the slight to John—and at the notion that he was misunderstood Mrs. Burletson caught fire.

“Is that what they say?” she exclaimed in a tone that caused Mr. Haniman to hunt for his hat, and make up his mind that he was urgently wanted at home. “They dare to call my son a coward! They dare! Then I quit, at once and for always, what I had in my mind to do. I had thought of taking a place in a boarding-house, and so fixing things that John could not but leave here unless he wanted to live alone—for I am sure that my comfort is in his mind, whatever else lays there as well—but now I will not do it. No; such mean, pitiful-minded folk as these shall never drive him from his home. Even Luke Selby? I never trusted that man’s face. I wonder what Jean—but never mind. I do not consider the opinion of any man or woman in Chippewa worth anything now. Going, Mr. Haniman? Then see, good friend, should you happen, as you must, to be in conversation with those who have spoken so about John, tell them from me that I should feel honoured if they would come to see me, and say to my face what they talk about behind his back. I will guarantee, Mr. Haniman, that I would find ways to cause every one to regret that he had ever opened his slanderous lips. Good afternoon to you.”

Then Mr. Haniman escaped, thankful and a little out of breath. But though for weeks afterward Mrs. Burletson religiously donned her best black silk gown and prepared to receive callers, nobody ever came. She did not say much to John. Deep and true as their love was for one another, John was too re-

served ever to speak, even to his mother, of the wound Jean's hand had given him, and Mrs. Burletson, though aching to know all about it, never dreamed of asking questions. She saw that from that day forth John worked as she had never known him work before, and that when he spent an hour with her in the evenings he was silent and absent-minded, and took little interest in anything but the newspapers. If this hurt her at times, she never let him see it. In his presence she was always bright and cheerful, and his sore heart was comforted in its bitter pain by the thought that she, at least, was happy.

One evening, a month from that never-to-be-forgotten Sunday morning, he came in earlier than usual, and after supper drew his chair close to her and kissed her.

"Mother, I have been poor company of late."

"Your work, John, has taken up the time. I never wish that you should give up that for me."

"It was a bitterness in my heart that made me work so. I have been very bitter."

"You have had cause," she said between her teeth.

"Hush! do not say that. It is not true, either, for I had nothing less to expect. I see that now, now that the worst—the worst for me, I mean—has come. I was foolish to worry. And so far as it has taught me my folly, this blow has done me good."

Mrs. Burletson looked up anxiously.

"The worst? what does that mean? I thought the worst had come before."

"I thought so too; I was wrong." He stooped

to pick up her ball of worsted. "Jean—Jean has become engaged to be married, mother, to Seth, the schoolmaster."

Mrs. Burletson sat perfectly still in her chair, but he felt her stiffen all over.

"How do you feel, son? Do it crush you—or what?"

He did not reply. His fingers were busy with the worsted ball, which had come unwound.

"Tell me how you feel, John."

"It is not easy," he said at last, carefully keeping his face from her. "It seems strange—kind as if I were dreaming. For Jean, you know, has seemed always, even since that day I told her I could not go to the war, to belong to me. Yet the news is true, and reasonable enough. I believe it is right, though I cannot see it that way."

He sighed, then took his mother's hand, and stroked it lovingly.

"Never mind; I have you. You are worth them all."

"I am not, John. Though I may be worth something while I live, I am very old and ailing. For long, very long now, I have looked to Jean—though I never thought her worthy of my boy—to make you happy, when the Lord took me. Now, what is to be when I am gone? Who will comfort and care for you? Oh, she is——"

"Don't, mother."

Mrs. Burletson looked dangerous.

"I must speak my mind, John. I will to her some day. If you are not bitter, I am for both of us.

What does it all mean? Do you tell me she has done this because you refused to volunteer?"

"That was the beginning. Jean, you know, has strong views."

"She has no heart, John, and little sense. There, I will stop. But God is very hard upon you, my own boy. Yet I pity her—she does not know what she has lost. She was never worthy of you. God knows that. Yet it is hard, for I cannot live much longer, and you are not a man to live alone."

"I shall be one of many. See, now, let us face it, and look at a brighter side. We will have great times, you and I. I shall get home earlier from work than I have done, and we will read together. The present is ours, mother. The future, as you have often told me, need not be taken till it comes."

He kissed her, and she leant against his shoulder, while the shadows of the evening darkened around them.

"My precious son," she whispered tremulously, "you are my life. It is all the world to me to have you here. I would not have said it if I thought there would be any chance now that you'd wish to go to the war. But as things are, I may tell you all my mind. I do not think, John, I should have lived a month from the day you started South."

CHAPTER VI.

THE spring of 1861, after the taking of Fort Sumter, was a time when the feelings of every American were wrought up to the highest pitch. From day to day, from hour to hour, people were expecting to hear news of national significance. There was the danger to Washington; the plots to assassinate Mr. Lincoln; the secession of Virginia when demand was made upon her to supply her quota of militia; the riots in Baltimore, when the first regiment of Northern troops, the 6th Massachusetts, passed through on their way to protect Washington. All these things, with a thousand rumours—laughable now, terribly serious then—were poured upon the public by the press, week after week, until excitable people could scarcely eat or sleep, and thought and dreamt of nothing but the war. Jean was one of these. Under the guidance of her closest friend, Mrs. Haniman, the minister's wife, she had been imbibing abolitionist literature of the most extreme type for a long while. When the time for action came she would have given worlds to have been a man, and could only comfort herself by urging every man she knew to volunteer. The enthusiasm and fire in Seth's nature was an infinite support to her. He seemed to read her

thoughts, and say and do just those things she expected from him at such a time. Then he was to command the company. He seemed, in her eyes, to have grown in dignity and power; and while others—men twice his size—spoke of him with respect as one who would be a leader of men, there was a delightful secret consciousness in Jean's heart that she was leading him; that every important step he took was referred to her first for approval, and sometimes was her own suggestion. She was realizing a dream of her life, and directly influencing the lives of others. With this feeling, however, came the consciousness that there could only be one end to it all. Seth's face was an open book, and days before he declared himself Jean knew what was coming. At any other time, impulsive as she was, Jean would have hesitated before she pledged her life to one whom until very lately she had only thought of as a friend, and not the most valued of her friends. Many who knew her were astounded when they heard of the engagement, for no one had ever thought of Jean as inclined to marriage. In this they were right; but it is a fact, not often recognised, that in times of excitement the girl who has never dreamt of marrying makes the first plunge.

The news was taken by Luke Selby with the philosophical resignation characteristic of a properly constituted American parent.

"It is not the choice I would have made," he said to his wife. "John was the man. He has more brains in one finger than there is in Seth's head. John, if he had behaved as he ought, would have been

top of the tree before this war played out. Curse his foolishness! 'Tis that which has done it all. But you cannot get away from facts. He went back on his bond—leastways climbed out after I'd helped him in—while Seth played up to the music, and put in at the right moment. We must make the best of it, Martha. There's one thing—Jean holds Seth as tight as I hold my store, and with her eternal energy will keep him waltzing to time. If Seth don't continue to make things jig, he will get blue brimstone for his wife."

To all of which wisdom Mrs. Selby had replied—

"Jean is a woman—or thinks she is. But she is a fool. Will ye have baked apple-fritters again for supper, or are you tired of them?"

Luke turned in his chair and looked at his wife with interest.

"Martha, your feelings must have been many to have crowded out such words as these. Wait, I say, wait and see how things eventuate. I have heard that folks get shot sometimes when they go to war. Jean will be older and wiser, maybe, later on."

In the afternoon of this day, only twenty-four hours after Seth had won his victory, a man in blue uniform alighted from a western bound train at the Chippewa depot, and inquired the way to Selby's store.

"My name is Simpson," he said to Luke, in a decidedly abrupt and not over-polite tone, as the store-keeper advanced with his blandest smile. "I have authority from Colonel Peck, commanding the 2nd Wisconsin Regiment of volunteers, to enrol the men

of this town whose names are down for enlistment. I was referred to you."

"I am proud to make your acquaintance, Major," Luke answered, extending a hand of friendship, which, however, the soldier failed to see. A military man of the old school, Major Simpson looked upon civilians of Luke Selby's type with a dislike too deep for words. "A blasted political wire-puller," was his inward comment. "I will have no truck with him." And he kept his word. At this moment Seth, who had run post-haste to the store when he heard of the major's arrival, came up. Luke turned to him with relief.

"Major, this gentleman is in command of the company—allow me to introduce——"

"I have heard of him," Major Simpson said with a slight change of manner; "Mr. Burletson, I presume. Well, sir, are there many, think you, of the boys here who will pass a doctor's examination and stand company drill? I have met precious few so far."

Seth blushed.

"My name is Cotton, sir—major, I mean. John Burletson resigned, and the boys elected me."

"Did they so?" said the major with a grim arch of the eyebrows. "You feel honoured, no doubt. Unfortunately it is my duty to inform you, Mr. Cotton, that in our regiment all who enlist begin from the ranks. Promotion, if it comes, will only commence after service in the field and for special merit. Now to business. Step this way, will you, please?"

This was a direct hint to Luke that his presence

was not desired. The store-keeper was highly indignant, and felt disposed, he said afterward, to question then and there Major Simpson's authority, and send in a strong complaint of his behaviour to headquarters. That he did not do the first may be accounted for by a certain inflexibility about the major. To attack him would be rather too much like striking a piece of cold iron; while the second course, though comforting to think of, was not easy to put into practice. So for the time, at any rate, Luke made the best of it, retired to his business, and swallowed his pride, while the major and Seth went outside the store.

"Have you seen service?" the major said.

"I have read a good amount, and am nearly through learning my drill manual."

"Drill fiddlestick!" was the testy answer. "Exactly what I expected. Lucky our colonel is a man of sense, and that we can find officers who know something. What most of the army will be like, the devil only knows, with officers holding command at the pleasure of their men, and whose knowledge begins and ends with a book. Let me see these boys. To-morrow the doctor will be here, and my drill-sergeant. Do you suppose we shall get a dozen to stay when they find we mean business? Speak your mind, lad."

He looked Seth up and down, measuring him with one shrewd glance.

"I guess most of them will stay. We mean business, too; as for myself, it was not at my request they made me captain."

"Well said," grunted the major. "I am glad to hear that. It may come, you know, in a better way. Are those the men?"

The news of the "army-major's" arrival had flown through town, and the company to a man had collected round the store—many of its younger members first embracing their mothers and sisters, under a vague impression that they were going to the front that afternoon.

"Put them through their facings," the major said, with another quick glance at his companion. "Let me see how far you have brought them."

Seth went hot all over. This Major Simpson was a little man, a head and shoulders shorter than himself, but in his squarely set figure, alert bearing, severe eyes, and sarcastic smile, there was a suggestion of power and superior knowledge that was most unnerving. Then the boys! For two weeks Seth had struggled, two hours daily, to get them into line—and keep them there—and persuade them to attempt the simplest of evolutions. There were countless difficulties, the chief one being that few would drill more than half an hour at a time. They said they were tired, and either sat down to smoke or strolled off for a drink, returning to their places later on—from the strongest sense of duty, they said—only to make the confusion of the rest worse confounded. This afternoon, under the eye of the major, who stood at a little distance looking on with frozen imperturbability, the gallant volunteers of Chippewa made tremendous efforts to do credit to their captain and themselves. Only once did an

elderly man, a tailor by trade, who was hard of hearing and irritable, ask Seth to "holler louder." No one offered to leave the ranks or even suggested that his throat was dry. Sturdily they stood and did their very best. A motley crowd. Here a man in silk-hat, broadcloth, and fine linen; next him a farmer, in flannel shirt and blue-jean pants; a clerk, weedy and pasty-faced, with delicate fingers; a labourer, dirty, ragged, and hard-handed; a lad of seventeen, the doctor's son; Luke's cashier, a rheumatic bachelor of fifty; men of every rank and every age, yet all animated with the same spirit—willing to leave their homes and give their lives for the Union cause.

Never will Seth forget that day. He had a good memory and a good voice, but he could not make others do what, except in theory, he had never done himself. It was a time of bitter torture to him, while his men, rather pleased with themselves, wheeled and marched at the word of command—in different directions; came to attention in a variety of ways—none of them correct; saluted when told to "dress by the right;" and, worst of all, came into violent collision with one another at the words "right about turn."

"It has been the poorest kind of show," he said hoarsely to the major when the men were at last dismissed. "I guess drilling is not in me."

"It will be in you as much as any one else when you have been taught," was the reply, in so kindly a tone, that Seth could have hugged him. "If you cannot handle men, you will a musket. To-morrow my sergeant shall take hold of this awkward squad.

He'll bring them into shape in good time. There is better stuff among your folk than I expected. You will see what drilling means when Silas Horrocks comes."

Seth did see. First, in the morning, every man was examined by a sharp-voiced military surgeon, who sent a fourth of them back to their homes as useless for service, deeply hurting their susceptibilities. In the afternoon came the sergeant, a big man with a voice of brass, a will of iron, the patience of an angel, and the eye of a New York detective.

"He put us through that blasted drill," said one of the "squad" afterward, "until the perspiration shone on our coat-tails. If war makes a man as thirsty as that sergeant, I guess we'll drink the Potomac dry when we get there. There ain't one mite of gilt-edge left to this volunteering biz, you bet your life on that."

At muster the following day many brave volunteers who had cheered themselves hoarse when Sumter fell, were missing—most of them giving notice that their mothers required them more than their country. The majority, however, stuck to the flag; while, as for Seth, he renounced all desire or claim to be an officer, and took his place with perfect good humour as a private in the ranks. Jean was at first very indignant that he should have been obliged to do this, and suffered a keen sense of personal disappointment and annoyance; but she acknowledged that he had played the part of a sensible man, and soon persuaded herself that he would be speedily promoted when his real qualities as a leader began to

show themselves. A week later Major Simpson drafted his Chippewa recruits to a camp twenty miles east, where, separated from business, relations, and love affairs, they settled down to drill in earnest. It was hard and weary work for them. At first the men grumbled because they had no rifles. "It seemed poor mean soldiering," they said, "to fool around with nothing in one's hands." When the arms came the complaints were louder than before, because the rifles were so heavy. Then they had a spell of wet weather, and drilled in a pool of mud; and the food was rough and hard, and some fell sick. At last, after a month had gone, and the men were losing their awkwardness, and their officers regaining their tempers, orders came that the 2nd Wisconsin was to go to the front. The news was received with heart-felt cheers. At last the deadly drill was over, the monotony of doing every day exactly what had been done the day before; the drudgery and weariness of learning by constant practice that which appeared so easy, and turned out to be so hard—especially for those past their first youth—was at an end. The first campaign was to begin; "On to Washington!" was the cry. Seth, with many others, got leave of absence the last day, and spent it in Chippewa. It was the first time he had been in town in uniform, and most devoutly did he wish that it had been a better fit. His trousers, loose and baggy, were too long, and had no "shape" at all; his forage-cap, with its straight pasteboard peak and a top like a crushed concertina, was a severe trial to him; his overcoat, which he had to wear, as it was raining, was far too

big—the collar up to his ears, the sleeves down to his finger-tips. But it was a *uniform*—the visible sign that he was one of those set apart, going to the war. People shook hands with him in the street. The boys cheered rapturously, and Jean, clinging to his arm, with shining eyes, thought no one looked more soldierlike and handsome. And through the weary weeks that followed, on the day of battle, and, worse still, the day after, Jean's farewell kiss and parting words were an unfailing comfort and stimulus to Seth. He loved her now with all his soul and strength, and he went back to camp that night determined to prove himself to be, if not the hero she believed, at least a lover of whom she should never be ashamed. Seth could see that Jean valued him at more than he was worth—so much the past few weeks had taught him. He was not, and probably never would be, a commander of men, and yet it was that above everything that Jean expected him to be. But after all, there were chances in the game of war no man might calculate. He would do his best; he would never turn his back upon the enemy—the rest lay in God's hands.

It was a drizzling, cold and miserable evening when the regiment prepared to embark upon the train that was to take them South. A number of the relations of the men had come to the depot at Marathon to see the last of them. Seth had no one. Luke Selby said he was too busy to get so far; Mrs. Selby could not leave her little ones; and Jean, though willing enough, could not go alone. It came about, therefore, that Seth, as he waited on the plat-

form with the rest, stood alone, while the boys around him chattered with fathers and brothers, sweethearts or wives. A wretched choky sensation tickled the back of his throat, and he walked away from the rest, feeling very forlorn and lonely. It was a little hard that there should not be one hand held out to him, one voice to wish him God-speed. Truly he was a solitary dog, and, but for Jean, not a soul cared whether he lived or died. "And even Jean," he said to himself in a momentary fit of bitterness, "will she mourn long? I guess not. Burletson is there, and when the war is done I shall be forgotten, and his day, and the days of all other 'home-guards,' will come. A cursed cowardly set." He set his teeth savagely, then coloured to the brim of his forage-cap, for he saw a familiar figure pushing its way toward him through the crowd—John himself.

"I came around here to see you," John said. "If you are engaged with others, I will go at once. I only came for a grip of the hand."

"You are just welcome," Seth answered huskily. "I feel lonesome as a boy left at his first school. But you will have many to see beside me."

"I came to you," John answered in a quiet tone. "No one else at all. We have not met since I heard of your engagement, and I felt I would not wish you to go away without one word from me, because——" He paused, then went on, looking Seth straight in the face all the time, "Jean is my oldest friend, and, until two months since, the most intimate I had. I feel, therefore, kind of especially interested in her. It makes no difference

that she is not interested in me. You are a fortunate man, Seth. How do these rifles act?"

"We stand first in the regiment there," Seth said warmly, studying John's face, and noticing many things, particularly how firm the lines about the mouth had grown. It was a grand, strong face.

"John," he cried, "you should be where I am now—only that you would hold a commission. Why, *why* did you hold back—why the devil did you—you, the best of us all?"

Camp life had not improved the refinement of Seth's speech. But his vehemence was heartfelt. John coloured slightly.

"I had my reason, and that reason stays with me now as it did then. Never mind me. I am dead and buried. It is you who are alive. I trust you'll come through gaily. I know it will not be second best."

The hearty words warmed Seth's quick enthusiasm.

"I will try—enough, if only for her sake. A man who failed with Jean behind him would be a skulk indeed. I beg your pardon," suddenly recollecting whom he was speaking to. "That was real mean of me."

John laughed, a genuine laugh, and slapped Seth on the shoulder.

"Come, come, I am not such sugar-candy as that amounts to, if I am a 'home guard.' There's the bugle. Are you off?"

"Yes; see, the train has been switched in. It will be good-bye in real earnest now."

They walked to the cars, and Seth swung in and

took up a place near the door, his comrades passing him. They were mostly Chippewa men, and seeing John, greeted him in so friendly a manner, that he was quite overcome. He had steeled his heart by this time to the silent contempt and coldness of his fellow-townsmen. He had begun to take it as a matter of course. This behaviour on the part of the boys themselves almost unmanned him. On their side his familiar face reminded them of home; his resignation of the captaincy was a thing of the past, while his gift of money, which had given them an advantage over their comrades, was vividly present in their minds. The consequence was, that when the men were in their places, crowding at the windows, and a shrill-voiced lad shouted, "Three cheers for Johnny Burtson's rifles!" they hurrahed with a will.

"All aboard!" was the cry now, and the train began to move. Seth stretched half his body through the window, and shook hands for the last time.

"Good-bye," he cried. "Take care of her till I get back, if I ever do. God bless you, John—Good-bye." The train moved faster. The crowd on the platform cheered; the soldiers answered; then from Seth's carriage some one struck up "John Brown's body." In a moment the song was caught up by a hundred voices, and to the sound of "Glory, glory, Hallelujah!" sung in all sorts of keys to no time at all, the train with its great cargo of flesh and blood departed on its way, and John, turning back to where he had left his horse—for he had ridden all the way to be in time—hid his face on the good beast's neck, and sobbed like a child.

CHAPTER VII.

THE summer had come, and now at last the armies of the North and the South, which for three months had been drilling and drilling, marching a little, fighting hardly at all, and boasting a great deal, were to meet in their full strength and fight the first great battle of the war. There had been isolated engagements which, as usual, the press on either side had tried to magnify—when their friends gained the advantage—into famous victories; but nothing had happened as yet to test the merits of the combatants as a whole. On the Union side there were whole regiments which had never fired a gun, and except for small contingents of regular troops—most of which were recruits—not a man had been really trained in musketry practice. Not a doubt, however, existed from one end of the North to the other, as to the certainty of a great victory when the enemy were met at last. The ordinary evolutions of drill had been well ground into the recruits during these three months of preparation; their equipment had been perfected. When the soldiers destined for the first advance southward, thirty-four thousand strong, defiled before the President at Washington on the 15th day of July, well armed, well clothed, full of mili-

tary ardour, their bearing erect, their faces already tanned by exposure in camp, it was no wonder that the folk throughout the North, ignorant of the meaning of war, led by editors and newspaper correspondents as ignorant as themselves, should believe that these men could conquer a continent, and march without check to Richmond, the Confederate capital. Many went so far as to count the days when Jefferson Davis, as arch-enemy to the Union cause, would be brought to Washington to be tried for high treason.

In well-informed circles the rumour went that General McDowell, the commander of the army, had protested against an advance being made so soon, giving as his reasons the inexperience of the regimental officers, and the want of any real discipline outside the drill-ground among the men, and that he had declared his army to be only fit for defensive operations. No one in the North, except a few military experts, gave credence to such reports. "On to Richmond," was the universal cry, and on the army went, blindly and exultantly, accompanied by a great number of civilians, anxious to witness the triumphs of the champions of the Union cause.

On the 16th day of July the march began from Washington to the base of operations, Centreville, a town twenty miles south. The Confederate forces were in position five miles further on, on the banks of Bull Run Creek. This march to Centreville will never be forgotten until the memory of Bull Run has faded from the minds of American men. For six miles the troops marched steadily; then, alas! the point of the unkind remarks upon their discipline be-

came painfully apparent. In nine regiments out of ten the men did exactly as they pleased. The day was hot, the dust ankle-deep, the rifles became heavier than bars of solid iron, and the knapsacks weighed upon the unaccustomed backs which bore them as if their contents had been turned into lead. Nor, when the nature of these contents is considered, was this very wonderful. Seth's kit was a good example of the rest: a pair of trousers, a pair of thick boots, four pairs of stockings, four flannel shirts, a blouse, a Bible, a volume of Shakespeare, and writing and shaving materials. In addition to these necessities there were, rolled upon the knapsack, a double woollen blanket and a waterproof. Under such burdens the stamina of the volunteers melted like butter in the sun. One by one at first, soon by scores and by hundreds, they fell out of the ranks and sat down under trees to rest and smoke; when they passed a stream they stopped to drink, or they loitered by the roadside, and paused to pick and eat blackberries. The 2nd Wisconsin, brigaded with the 13th, 69th, and 79th New York Regiments, under command of Colonel W. T. Sherman, became completely mixed up, and but for a fine diversity of uniforms which prevailed in both armies at the beginning of the war, might have been a long time disentangling themselves. As for Seth and his comrades of Company A, to their credit be it said, they neither picked blackberries nor kicked their heels on fences, but, with an occasional rest, marched steadily through. Their captain was shrewd, active and popular, and by a constant fire of sarcastic pleasantry at the expense of

laggards, kept his men together, and brought them into Centreville on the second day, July 18th, foot-sore and very weary. At Centreville they heard the first boom of cannon, and the men thought a great battle had begun. They eat a hasty meal, and then many began stealthily writing letters of farewell to loved ones at home, or sat about in groups talking nervously. Seth was on sentry duty. As he paced to and fro, his eyes scanning the fields and hillocks and scattered trees to the south, his ears painfully alive to the dull roar of artillery and the sharp crackle of musketry, he thought of Jean, and contrasted the present with the past. He was still very tired, his spirits were depressed, and a conversation he had overheard a few minutes before between his captain and Major Simpson had not tended to reassure him.

“We shall not be ready to begin until the troops come up,” the captain had said. “That will not be to-day.”

“Do you think they’ll ever get here? I don’t,” the major snarled in reply. The worthy man was in a very bad temper. “If they do, don’t you be under any impression that they will fight. I tell you the first time they see a drop of blood they’ll run. I am sick of this affair. With a division of regulars I would whip those seceders into h—l. But I have no use for men like ours—blasted civilians in uniform, which they don’t know how to wear!”

“The Rebs may be as bad,” the captain had rejoined.

“Not possible. Anyway they can’t be worse, and they are on their own ground. I bet they know well

what we are about. What do we know of their movements?"

Seth believed the major to be right, and felt very wretched. He had shared to the full the popular belief in the immediate and decisive success of the Union arms. Now, reaction had come, and he foresaw nothing but disaster. A presentiment weighed upon him that he would lose control of his nerves, and at some critical moment run away. He saw himself before a court martial, sentenced to be shot for cowardice, and Jean coldly saying that it served him right. In the over-wrought state of his nerves all these ideas appeared prophetic, and his spirits fell lower and lower. But now a horseman approached at full gallop, and the morbid phantoms vanished.

"Who goes there?"

"Courier from General Tyler."

The man rode to the rear. He was an orderly from the front. It was a call for re-enforcements, and presently the brigade battery (Ayers's) limbered up and passed Seth at a gallop. Then Colonel Sherman trotted by with his staff, and Seth marked well this hard-faced man with his bright eyes, and thought he looked resolute enough for anything. The sight refreshed him. Another orderly rode up, saluted the colonel, and presented a dirty bit of paper. Orders were given to advance the whole brigade.

Away with love-lorn sentimental broodings. In less time than Major Simpson, for one, would have believed possible, the men were in column, advancing at the double quick. There was no more sentry duty for Seth, no more doubts and fears. He was shoul-

der to shoulder with comrades now, marching to the front. No one knew what there was ahead. The wonderfully accurate information of the enemy's movements, and of the intentions of their own generals, that the rank and file of the armies gained later in the war, did not exist as yet. Every one expected a battle, and each braced himself to meet it in his own way. There was no talking now—mere volunteer and raw recruits these men might be, but they meant fighting.

They marched three miles, the roar of the guns steadily increasing, until they reached the fields directly sloping to Bull Run Creek. The first visible signs of the battle now confronted them: a straggling crowd of soldiers were approaching, Union men, some limping and bloody, some without arms, running for their lives; others walking sullenly with bent heads, rifle at shoulder, all in full retreat.

“Halt!”

The march was over, and the 2nd Wisconsin, which was the advance column, formed into line of battle. Where were the rebels? Every one expected to see them in pursuit, and watched with anxious eyes the thick belt of trees that bordered the creek from which the firing came. But no men appeared. Nothing but puffs of smoke, and shot which tore up the ground in places to the feet of the regiment. It was sickening work for recruits, standing still to be shot at; there was no cover to protect them, and no order was given to charge. The men soon became mere bags of nerves, and muttered imprecations first on the army then on their own commander. Here

they had to remain for half an hour—the longest thirty minutes, most of them felt, they had ever passed in their lives. They were then marched back to their old camp, discouraged and very cross.

By degrees the news spread that General Tyler had made a reconnaissance, attempting to carry Blackburn's Ford over Bull Run, and had been repulsed by the enemy, who were posted there in considerable force.

"Blasted fool, Tyler!" was the comment of Silas Horrocks, Seth's sergeant, who had been through the Mexican War, to an admiring crowd of recruits round the camp fire. "What did he do it for? We all reckoned the seceshers were there. The only thing we know now that wasn't known before is that those boys have darned long teeth. That ain't worth anybody's life but Tyler's own, which has been carefully preserved. He is like a pile more of our officers. The returns of killed and wounded we'll send in by-and-by through their mistakes will show that presently—mark my words now, you pretty volunteers!"

Two days and nights were spent in the camp at Centreville, both men and officers chafing at the delay—none more than their commander, McDowell, who knew that every hour that passed enabled the Confederates to bring up re-enforcements. But it was inevitable, the result of the miserable *fiasco* of a march from Washington, and inexperienced staff officers innocent of any notion how to make effective reconnaissances of the enemy's position and strength.

At last, at one o'clock on the morning of the 21st, the sound of muffled drums broke the stillness of the

camp, and Sherman's brigade arose with the rest, every man feeling in his very bones that the time had come. The air was raw and cold; the men were very sleepy and tired; they shivered and growled, and wished the enemy and the war, the Union cause and all, at the bottom of the sea. By two o'clock the camp had faded into the distance behind them, and they were again marching on to the creek. No firing to be heard now. The brigade marched on unopposed, until it was halted on the banks of Bull Run, and deployed in line along an edging of timber which afforded the men welcome cover in case of an attack. A pause—a long, long pause. The daylight crept into the sky, and the sun rose; birds sang in the trees, the animal life of the neighbourhood began to bestir itself in the usual daily round of occupation, bewildered and curious, but not much afraid of these lines of blue and gray-coated men. Still there was no firing. This was harder on the nerves of the recruits than the night march. Vague haunting fears beset them; and the least disturbance, a chance shot, or cry, or loud noise, would have driven them into panic. Presently a movement was perceived across the creek. Men were marching there in column at a smart pace, moving away to the right away from the stream. It was a body of the enemy off to intercept the brigade which had marched before Sherman, showing that part of the Union army had succeeded in crossing Bull Run, and was making steady progress toward the heart of the Confederate position. The fears now became intense restlessness, but the men were comforted for a little while by watching their bat-

tery wheel into position to fire upon the enemy's column. The disappointment when it was discovered that the guns would not carry so far was very bitter, and the language in the brigade became outrageous. The sound of brisk musketry fire now began directly in front, quickly growing louder, and the news flew down the line that Hunter's brigade was driving the enemy before it like chaff. The swearing began again—this time at Hunter's brigade. It was hard to stand still and passive while others were marching to victory, and winning immortal fame at every step. Hunter's brigade was more unpopular than the enemy for the moment.

At last, just at noon, came the order the brigade waited for so long. They were to advance to Hunter's support. That enterprising man had gone too fast; had been met, as might have been expected, with a superior force, and was in distress. A ford was found by the quick eye of Sherman; over went a company in skirmishing order, then the New York 69th, then the 2nd Wisconsin. No hitch occurred, and order was given to advance slowly and firmly. There was no fear in the mind of any man now that the fighting would be over before they could reach it. The rattling fire in front had become one continuous roar, very trying to unaccustomed ears, growing louder as more men came into action on both sides. Company A marched at the head of the regiment, its spirits rising at every step. All hearts beat high with courage and excitement; old fatigues, disappointments, and fears were forgotten; they panted to be in the thick of the fight. They clambered up the

steep banks, and marched at a swinging pace over fields already strewn with dead men and wounded horses. This was a gruesome, sickening sight for recruits, but they had braced their nerves to meet it, and though their faces blanched at this first glimpse of war, and the smell of blood made many sick and faint, they set their teeth against the weakness, grasped their guns the tighter, and hurried grimly on.

“Form into line of battle!”

“Thank God,” the men whispered under their breath, then cheered to the echo when they found that the 2nd Wisconsin was to lead. No one knew how the battle stood. The ground had been rising for some time, and they were forming on a hill. In front of them was the dip of a valley, and then another hill, dark with masses of men. The desperate fighting was there; they could tell so much; and no victory for either side was to be recorded yet. It was said that the place they now occupied, “Mathew’s Hill,” had been in the possession of the enemy, and that the work before the Union army was to storm and take “Henry Hill,” the ridge opposite, where stood the main body of the Confederates at bay. Henry Hill carried—the day was won. It was the key of the position. For hours before this time the fighting there—dashing assault and stubborn defence had been growing fiercer as both sides brought up reinforcements from the rear; but there was no victory for either army yet. It was now the turn of Sherman’s brigade.

“Second Wisconsin, advance!”

Down Mathew’s Hill they went, met by a fierce

artillery fire, and men fell right and left. The hearts of the West Point officers trembled with suspense—would the boys falter at their first baptism of death? Not they. Ill-disciplined as they were, all unused to pain and carnage, and their nerves severely tried with the long anxious waiting, their blood was up. On they went, steadily, Company A in the van. At Seth's right rode Major Simpson. As he saw the steady swing of the step of his men, and how coolly the gaps in the ranks were closed, his stern face became almost paternal in its approval.

"Steady, you boys; steady we go. Don't lose your breath by rushing too soon. Hold to it quietly until we are within fifty yards, then drive those rebs to h—l!"

They held to it, and at the bottom of the hill, at Young's Ford, struck a road deeply cut in the clay, in which for a space they were sheltered from the cruel shot. But it was only for a little while. Again the ground began to rise. They were at the foot of Henry Hill. The road ceased.

"Left wheel!"

Now their time had come. Around them the men of the regiment which had gone before lay dead in lines and heaps, and over the ground they had to pass to reach the foe; his guns were hurling sheets of deadly hail, to which all they had faced so far had been mere child's play. A shout, the flash of the officers' swords in the sun, a ringing cheer, and they charged. Seth, white with excitement and nearly breathless, found himself blindly following the gray horse on which the major sat. While that horse held

its course, Seth would go on to the bottomless pit if need be. Whether men were beside him or not, he did not know. He forgot all about the company, the regiment, everything except the enemy's line away in front and the gray horse close at his side. All at once the animal reared, threw itself backward, and fell dead. Seth stopped, dropped his musket, and tried to extricate the dying man. The major cursed him for his pains.

"Get out," he yelled. "You damned coward, let me be!" Then collecting every remnant of strength left in him, he raised his voice to its highest pitch. "Forward, boys; charge *now*, and the day is ours!"

Nerved by the cry, Seth caught up his musket, and was about to spring onward, when he was nearly knocked down by two men who were in retreat. He staggered, and dropped the rifle again, picked it up, and looked at the major. He was already dead, his face stiff, the eyes glazed and dull. A shudder passed through Seth, a cold dread paralyzed his nerves, and he followed the men down the hill. It was only for a short distance, however. Other officers were here, cursing, commanding, beseeching their men to stay. Half a dozen near Seth rallied, all of Company A, and Seth stepped in beside them. Their own captain was there to lead, and as they faced round and marched back, others joined them with a cheer. Then the havoc of the guns began again. The men on either side of Seth were struck down. No one filled the gaps, for there was no sense of discipline now to hold the men together. One by one they faltered, and at last Seth, seeing a man in front struck

in the body and roll on the ground shrieking in mortal agony, could endure it no more; again the dread seized him, and he turned with a cry and ran.

At the bottom of the hill, in the sheltered road, the officers managed to reform the broken ranks—but it was to retreat. The attack on Henry Hill had failed. The gallant defence of the Confederates—more especially Jackson's brigade, animated by their commander, to be known as "Stonewall" from that day—and the timely arrival of re-enforcements turned the scale in their favour. The Union army began to waver and break. Back with the rest went Sherman's brigade; sullenly, slowly, unwillingly. Back to the ford; across the creek; to Centreville once more; there to pause and eat and sleep. Their commander was prepared to renew the struggle on the morrow; but the men had no thought of fighting. Seth, with burning brain and shivering limbs, his left arm throbbing with pain from a bullet wound, sat before the camp fire, tortured by every ghastly scene of the day, living the futile charge of Henry Hill over again, hearing the shriek of the dying man and Major Simpson's curse; sick, miserable, and worn out in soul and body and mind.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE retreat of the Union army after the first battle of Bull Run has been described by many pens, from many points of view. It was a ghastly, and nigh inevitable complement to the march from Washington. The men who had sat down by the wayside and gathered blackberries, when their fond ones at home pictured them pressing on with stern faces and high hearts to the destruction of the rebels, were not of the stuff—yet—to take defeat and the slaughter of their bravest calmly or even reasonably. A battle with raw troops, however good the material may be, is a matter of extremes. At first they fight bravely, and when well led will face even big guns for a time; but when they turn, when once their hearts fail them, they are lost. At Bull Run, when the bloody struggle for Henry Hill was over, though a few regiments here and there, like Sherman's brigade, bore themselves like soldiers, and retreated slowly and in order, the rest left the field piecemeal—the men melting away in streams, pressing faster and faster upon one another's heels until the retreat became the terrified rush of a herd of animals. By midnight, the whole army, instead of taking up its old position at Centreville, which it might safely have done, was

rolling back to Washington, one inextricable mass of confused, demoralized men. Infantry, cavalry, artillery, were mixed up together, struggling and swearing, perspiring with terror at fears their own imagination conjured up, crying out that the enemy was pressing hard upon their rear and would cut off their retreat, while in reality only a comparatively small number of Confederate soldiers were in pursuit. All those weary miles the men never paused in their retreat, reaching Washington early next morning. Walt Whitman has described their entry there:

“The men appear—in disorderly mobs—some in squads; stragglers, companies, three-quarter queer looking objects; strange eyes and faces, drenched and fearfully worn; hungry, haggard, blistered in the feet. In the midst of the deep excitement many, very many of the soldiers are sleeping. They drop down anywhere, on the steps of houses, up close by the basement and fences; in the side walk; aside in some vacant lot, and deeply sleep. Some sleep in squads, some singly; and over them as they lie, sullenly drips the rain.”

One of these sleepers was Seth. When the army swept past Centreville Sherman's brigade were obliged to follow, and meeting others in the darkness at a cross-road, fell into some confusion, many of the men falling out of the ranks and losing themselves. Seth had done this. His wound had made him feverish and light-headed, and he had marched with the rest, hardly knowing what he was about. At the confusion of the cross-roads, the panic of other brigades had infected him, and he hurried blindly on, some-

times on the road, in the ditch, or in the open field, always with others, but with no one that he knew. When day came at last, when "the sun rose but shone not," he was tramping over Long Bridge cheek by jowl with men of half a dozen different regiments. Weariness oppressed him now, his limbs trembled, his head was heavy and his eyes half closed, yet the ghastly dread of an enemy in pursuit drawing nearer every moment, still overpowered everything else, and he staggered on until he came to the suburbs of Washington.

"They will defend the capital," he muttered; "I guess we're safe now—but I must find the boys or they'll call me a deserter." He was firmly persuaded that his regiment was in front, and with feet swollen and bleeding, his legs racked with shooting pains, he stumbled doggedly on. At last nature would endure no more, and at the edge of the side walk of the first street he came to he sat down to rest a minute, presently sinking on his face and falling sound asleep.

When he awoke he found himself in bed, and for a moment thought he was in his old rooms at Chipewa. Then he saw that the place was filled with many beds and as his head grew clearer that he was in hospital. He lay still for a long time wondering. His left arm was bandaged tightly—he could not move it, and when he lifted his right hand he found it absurdly weak. Afterward he ascertained that a bullet had been extracted from the arm and that he had lain for days in high fever and delirious. All he realized himself was the pain in his arm and a bitter thirst. Seth would have given anything for

something to drink. He looked about for some one to bring him water; but except for other men, in bed, wounded like himself, he could see no one. He was presently roused from consideration of his own wants by a conversation that was taking place over his bed. It was begun by a man on his left, who was reading a newspaper, and had addressed a question to a youth with bandaged neck and shoulder.

"When is your time out, friend?"

"These four days. I am a three months' man."

"So am I, thank the Lord!"

"I shall re-enlist, though."

"You will not!"

The speaker, who was fat and middle aged, with a coarse, shrewd face, spoke in a tone of most emphatic disgust. The other looked surprised, while Seth, who in common with most of the first volunteers had also joined for three months only, began to listen with interest.

"Don't you think there'll be work for us?" the lad said. "We must whip those seceshers now we've made a start."

"Whip 'em!" the fat man cried, with a fine scorn. "Of course we'll whip 'em; and that without a battle, or only half a one. But this don't concern any of us who was wounded at Bull Run, unless we had been fools enough to volunteer over ninety days. Now, sir-ree, listen to this." He rustled his newspaper with a professional air to attract attention. At home he had been a political agitator. He had become a volunteer for what he could get out of it, and having extracted nothing but a broken leg, was

now burning to revenge himself on the Government. "There is but one sensible and proper course for self-respecting citizens, who went forth in their country's cause in April or May last, to pursue, and that is to get back home and stay there. It is reasonable; it is right; it is patriotic. You think not? Then"—raising his voice so that it could be heard all over the room—"I will proceed to demonstrate my case. What, friend, caused our defeat at Bull Run? I will tell you. Your officers. The West Pointers and their friends, puffed up to the eyes with all the pride an' ignorance of creation. I reckon, my gallant wounded heroes, that I can prove this to be an undeniable fact. Who, but for these bunglers and snobs, would have beaten the enemy to threads? The men! *You!* Ay, and all your dead brothers, lyin' now on the bloody swards of Henry Hill. What is to be done about it? Listen to me. First take these captains, an' colonels, and brigadier generals—take them from the high places they abuse, and put in there men of the people, 'lected by the people. Next let you and me and those who have suffered behave with proper dignity, and refuse to take a further share of this shooting business until the boys who stayed at home and who, you will see by the papers, are cursin' us to-day, have done their share. Let us tell them to go to the front, and see how they like it. We will take the work they leave behind 'em, and rest awhile. There is another way of looking at it. Do you"—glaring at the man he spoke to first of all—"want to keep all the glory to yourself? Ain't your wounds an honour that will keep you goin' a spell? Ain't

you got folk who need you? I have. Don't charity begin at home? I tell you, friends all," with a concluding flourish—the doctor had come in to begin his rounds, and it was time to stop—"that the course I recommend to you is one of Christian duty. I will be pleased to argify quietly with any one of you who don't see it so. I will guarantee to convince him even that he is wrong and I am right. Let folk like newspaper editors, and other trash that have never left their homes, blow the loud trumpets. For you and me, sense and duty to those we love the best require that we should do what I have said."

The eloquence of the man—Galibrag by name—was not without effect. Hospital life all the world over is dull and monotonous; a new interest, especially of a personal kind, is welcome, be what it may. Nearly all were "three months' men, and though many did not agree with Mr. Galibrag at first, they found him a difficult person to argue with, as all men are who can shift their ground according to the point of view of their opponent and know how to touch him in his weakest place, like a skilful boxer in the ring. He was more dangerous in conversation than on the stump, and, as fate would have it, his bed was next to Seth's. Mr. Galibrag took a fancy to Seth, or said he did, and when Seth, after he had gained strength, took up the cudgels on the other side, Mr. Galibrag met him in the most cordial spirit.

"Mind you, now, friend," he said loftily, "I would not influence a man against his inclination—no, not for the world. If you feel that the Government and your officers acted right toward you; if

drilling, and hard food and catching chills, and bein' marched round like a dancin' bear to the tune of the sergeant's tongue, suits your constitution, I would say nothing. It is a matter of taste and of men. But I reckon a man of education—more 'specially a man who can educate others—a rare gift, sir, a most rare gift—must have peculiar ideas of usefulness if, rather than be independent and serve his country in a dignified way as a free citizen, he prefers to be what some call a soldier and I call a slave. But how does it come to you? Let us discuss your own particular case."

This Seth declined to do brusquely, apologized for his rudeness, and finally was led to talk a great deal about himself. The prejudice he first conceived against Mr. Galibrag moderated, as he became used to the man's manner, and as Mr. Galibrag became better acquainted with him. Seth was sick in mind as well as body. His nerves had never recovered tone, though he was considered convalescent. Any unexpected noise would make him start violently, and he felt a childish dread of discomfort and bodily pain. Most of all, he suffered from home sickness, and ached for a sight of Jean. They had exchanged letters since Bull Run, hers full of affectionate solicitude and warm praise of his gallantry, for some one, it appeared, now at Chippewa, had seen him charge up Henry Hill. He longed to be with her. He had won his spurs. At least he might rest awhile and enjoy his reward. Mr. Galibrag's arguments disposed him to go even further, and he began to conjure up a vision of re-organization of the school, mar-

riage, and, what he had craved for all his life, a home of his own. On the other hand, Mr. Galibrag's own personality was objectionable, and when he departed, the atmosphere of the hospital seemed purer and cleaner. A few days later Seth took his discharge, and began the long journey to Chippewa. He left against the advice of the doctor, who warned him that over-exertion might cause inflammation of the wounded arm not yet healed. But Seth could not stand the confinement and depressing surroundings any longer. He believed that active change of scene and thought was all he needed, and took the risk without hesitation. When he reached the railway depot, he felt so exhausted and miserable he would have turned back; but pride forbade it. So he took his ticket, and as the train carried him northward he smiled a contented smile, and jolted on uncomplainingly in the dusty car, his faded uniform hanging in clumsy folds over his lean limbs, his arm still in a sling, and a beard of five weeks' growth adding to the cadaverousness of his hollow cheeks. It was a terrible journey. The weather was hot and close; the cars were ill-ventilated, with hard bare wood seats, and populated by peculiarly vicious and bloodthirsty mosquitoes. Sleep at night was out of the question, there was no rest by day, and the food Seth allowed himself out of his very slender resources was coarse and badly cooked. It was not to be wondered at, therefore, if his mind dwelt upon what he should have left alone—his sufferings at Bull Run; if fresh fever in his blood began to germinate. The last night he was so much exhausted that he dozed fitfully in spite of

his aching limbs, but it was to dream of the horrors over again. Seth was thankful when daylight came; and to employ the few hours that remained before he reached Marathon Junction, where he had to change for Chippewa, he took pencil and paper and scribbled a letter to Jean. He had made up his mind definitely not to return to the war, and he felt that he could put his reasons better on paper than he could give them in speech. He would, he thought, break the ice when they were together, and then leave her the letter to read. The writing down of his thoughts and feelings did him good. He got a morning nap, and woke, somewhat refreshed, just before the train rolled into Marathon. But here the greatest trial of all awaited him. The train was two hours behind time, the Chippewa train for the day had gone, and he must remain at Marathon four-and-twenty hours. It was a climax to all he had endured. A whole day and night to pass before he could see Jean! He cursed, until he was weak. What was to be done? He could not afford to stay at the hotel. The total amount of his resources when he left Washington, except for one hundred dollars in the bank at Chippewa, had been thirty-nine dollars for three months' service in the army. Of this sum he had five dollars left; and there was still the railway fare from Marathon to pay. The result of this discovery was a resolve to get two meals at the hotel, one this afternoon, and one to-morrow, and spend the night at the depot, on a bench. The hotel was some way from the railroad, at the top of a long hill, and by the time Seth reached it, he was feeling very ill.

He stumbled into the dining-room, ordered two dough-nuts and a cup of coffee, and then, utterly worn out, closed his eyes and began to wonder with considerable disgust whether he was going to faint. Some one came up and stood over him. Seth opened his eyes languidly, thinking it was the waiter. It was John Burletson.

"Why, John, old friend!" and they shook hands warmly.

"I thought it could be no one else," John said. "But, Seth, you are sick. I hardly knew you."

"I am whittled down a little," Seth replied, in a voice he strove to make cool and indifferent. "The weather is infernal, and this thing," touching his wounded arm, "is inclined to play it rather low-down on me. It ought to be well by now."

John sat down and looked at him.

"You are bound for Chippewa?"

"I thought so, but these beastly cars went back on me. I will arrive there to-morrow—all that the mosquitoes at the depot choose to leave. What a cursed noise folk make in these places! The voices of those girls go through me. How much, waiter?"

A negro placed his repast before him, which John looked at disapprovingly.

"Twenty-five cents, sar—cap'n, I mean."

"I will give you ten," Seth cried irritably; "twenty-five be hanged!"

"Dough-nuts, ten, sar; coffee, fifteen. Ask de boss, please."

"Take away the coffee, then," Seth said grimly, "and bring me a glass of water."

The waiter obeyed, with a contemptuous shrug. John left his chair.

"Excuse me, friend, one minute," he said. "I have forgotten something."

When he returned he found Seth at the window.

"Let us go out of this, John. Do you mind? I feel stifled here. It has come to me while you were absent that I would like to tell you something. Have you time to spare?"

Seth spoke in an excited, feverish tone, and John noticed that his face was flushed and twitching all over.

"I would like nothing better. But I know a place better than the street."

"Are you staying here?"

"I have a private room engaged."

He led Seth into the hall and up a flight of stairs, and took him into a comfortably furnished apartment with a carpet, rocking-chair, and a bed with mosquito curtains.

"Comfort—by George!" Seth sighed, sinking into the chair, while John shut the door and placed himself astride of a stool. "I have not seen such a place as this since—since I saw you last."

"How long have you been out of hospital?"

"Three days—I have come straight from there."

"Were you stout enough for the journey?"

"I guess so. Anyway, I had been there long enough. Why?"

"You are so—thin."

"That is nothing at all. Now, tell me, how are

the folk? I seem to have been away years. Has any one got the school?"

"They have a man for the time."

"Not permanently? Good business. See—I am going to tell you what is in my mind. I don't intend going back to the war. I am near played out. Anyway, I feel I have done enough for the country. I am going to play for myself. You were a wise man, old John; by thunder, you were indeed. War is pretty to read about; but, the reality is a devilish business—simply devilish. You find me changed! But for my uniform, I bet you would not have known me. Why, my idea is to get back to the school, work like ten men, and get married. I don't know what Jean will say about it. I have written to her in case of accidents, for I have felt, to tell the truth, so wretchedly mean and poorly, that I got an idea into my head I might not get as far as Chippewa for a while. But stop. What is in your mind? Something ugly, I can see. Do you think I am in the wrong track to talk of staying at home? I am not. But tell me, what do you think? Tell me straight."

John bent his head.

"I was thinking——"

"Well?"

"You would be the only one—to stay behind."

"There are thousands leaving, now that their time is up."

"Not around Chippewa."

"Then you think me a coward?"

"I did not say that."

"It is in your mind."

"Not at all. But let us drop this."

"I came to talk about just that thing. But I feel I am trespassing here—come outside."

He sprang up in a temper, then staggered, and would have fallen had not John caught his arm.

"Seth, lie down at once."

He pulled him gently but firmly to the bed. Seth yielded with a laugh.

"I guess I am limp—for the moment. Exeuse me, I will be right in a minute."

John covered his feet with a rug.

"I wonder how long it takes a doetor to get round in these parts," he said, looking at his watch. Seth sat up.

"Pshaw, man—did you send for one?"

There was a knock at the door, and a man of seedy appearance came in and introduced himself as the "doetor of Marathon city." He apologized for not arriving before, omitting to state that the cause for his delay was the charms of a brandy-and-soda he had been discussing in the landlord's private room. He was sober enough, however, to see what was the matter with Seth.

"You will lay where you are, young man," he said solemnly—"jest exaetly where you are—until I tell you to git. How long? Mebbe a week—mebbe two. All depends."

"Nonsense!" Seth answered. "I am going on to Chippewa to-morrow."

"Then you will die, sir; I sw'ar you will. You are on the way to having a very bad fever."

"Blast the fever!" Seth said with shut teeth. "I must see my folk—and to-morrow."

"Have 'em here," said the doctor, beginning to wake up to the importance of securing a patient.

"They could not come."

"They will if they value your life. Can't your brother, here," turning to John, "tell 'em about it, and tote 'em round?"

It was now John's turn to be taken aback, the more so as Seth caught up the notion eagerly. His mind just now had only room for one thought.

"Why, that is a good idea," he cried. "You will do it, I know, John, and take my letter with you. It is a mean thing for me to trouble you, but I reckon I do feel pretty sick after all. I would be very grateful."

John sighed and yielded. The lad was very ill. This doctor was a beast, yet right, John thought, in his opinion. Care and nursing by experienced hands was absolutely necessary.

"I will go," he said quietly, and helped Seth to undress. He then had an interview with the hotel-keeper and his wife, the result of which was that everything was given to Seth which he could need for the present. A telegram was despatched to Mrs. Burletson, a light sulky chartered, and a swift horse, and John set off for Chippewa as fast as the animal would go. In his pocket was the letter for Jean which Seth had written in the cars.

CHAPTER IX.

JOHN had not spoken to Jean since Seth left for the front. When they had passed one another in the street or met in the store, she would bow coldly, he simply raise his hat. People speculated much on what could have caused such a breach between these friends. Few believed that John's refusal to volunteer could be the sole reason. But everybody was sure of one thing. There never would be a reconciliation, even if Seth were killed in the war. Jean's pride was proverbial, and every one knew the obstinacy of the Burletson family. There was a strong feeling of sympathy among the older folk with Luke Selby. Through no fault of his own, he had lost the most eligible son-in-law in town. It was hard luck. The sentimental side of the affair did not appeal to the citizens of Chippewa, while the young people who had looked upon John as certain to be Jean's choice, were glad now to a man—and a woman—that he had lost her. "The girls of this town," one of them proudly said, "are not going to marry 'home guards,' no matter what they thought before."

John left the horses a few blocks away and entered the store by the back door. This was in order

to avoid Luke, who had not only apologized in set terms for the warmth of his language on that fatal Sunday, but was becoming cordial and friendly to a degree John found distinctly embarrassing. Mrs. Selby was the right person to see. John knew she did not care for Seth, but was sure the boy's illness would touch her heart at once, and she would tell Jean. He went, therefore, straight to the kitchen. As luck would have it, Jean, and not her mother, was in the kitchen at this particular moment. The entrance of such a totally unexpected person as John made Jean give a very perceptible start, and blush violently—things which gave her particular annoyance under the circumstances.

"I beg your pardon," John said, hastily stepping back, and in so doing treading hard upon the tail of Jean's cat, which mewed dismally. "I have come with a message"—he was going to say "from Seth," but Jean did not allow him to finish.

"You will find mother," she said, "in the store."

But John stood his ground. He had taken up the aggrieved cat, which recognised him and purred with all its might.

"I will see your mother presently. But as we have met, Jean, I must tell you first. Seth asked me to come."

"Seth? Where is he?"

"Robjoint's Hotel, Marathon. Held there by sickness on his way home."

"He must be very sick."

Her tone sounded unsympathetic, and John,

though he suspected that this was assumed for his benefit, felt indignant on Seth's account.

"He is—or I would not be here. The doctor said that if he stirred one step, he'd not answer for his life. Even then it was all we could do to keep Seth down. I had to quiet him by a promise to bring a letter and tell you exactly how things were. It was much against my will."

Jean's eyes dropped before the look he gave her.

"You have been put to much trouble," she murmured, taking the note. "Seth—Seth should thank you."

There was a touch of bitterness in the last words, which John could not understand.

"Won't you sit down, John?" she continued. "Mother will be so pleased to see you."

John thanked her, watching her under his eyebrows with dreamy interest. It was unnatural even yet that this was not his Jean. The old wound began to ache again, and John gave himself a shake, and tried to turn his thoughts to Seth. What would the effect of this letter be? Jean's enthusiasm for the war, which had been a passion before Bull Run, was her religion now. It was less aggressive. She would not now sing "John Brown's Body" from a public platform, but it was infinitely deeper. This was a bad time for the news of Seth's change of ideas. She should have seen him first. With these thoughts passing through his mind, John's eyes became intently fixed upon Jean's face, until she glanced up and saw him.

"Have you—do you know what is in this letter, may I ask?"

"He told me something—not much."

"About his giving up the army?"

"Yes."

Jean was very pale now, but in her eyes there was an expression not pleasant to see.

"Did you talk with him any? You advised him, perhaps?"

Her voice was quiet, with a curious vibration in it.

John was rather taken by surprise. He had not expected to be questioned about the letter, and now, anxious not to betray what Seth had said, which he felt must not come through a third person, hesitated before he answered. Jean noticed this, and the suspicion in her eyes deepened.

"We had a few words," John answered; "but they were of no importance. He was too sick for me to allow him to talk."

"No importance! Do you say that? Yet, after all, maybe I am wrong"—her tone was now bitterly sarcastic—"perhaps we speak at cross-purposes. *You* may not think it of importance for an honest man, who was as brave as the bravest, to turn back, when for his country's sake he should go forward as he never went before. Oh, why have you, of all men, crossed his path just now? Sick? He must be nigh mad to listen to you, who never went at all."

The inner door opened, and Mrs. Selby came in. Jean stopped, and walked away to finish her letter. Mrs. Selby's honest face beamed like a sun.

"You, John, callin'? What a pleasure it is to see you! What has brought ye?—though never think of explainin' to me. I find it too good to see your face here once more to ask for explanations. How is your dear mother?"

"Well—thank you, kindly."

"Which you are not," Mrs. Selby said, frowning. "You are looking death-pale."

John smiled at her tone of solicitude.

"'Tis nothing but the want of a meal, ma'am. I have ridden from Marathon, and had not time for a bite. You are wanted, Mrs. Selby, badly."

His voice was very determined. Jean had roused him effectually. Not so much by the insinuation that he had tried to influence Seth, that he thought was natural after the way she had misunderstood him, but by her apparent inclination to question her lover's motives when she should have been engrossed by anxiety for his sufferings.

"I came with a message for Jean," John went on; "I must give it to you. Seth is at Marathon, too weak to move, and if he does not receive care and good nursing, and get a sight of the face he loves, I doubt if he ever will move again. I thought perhaps you would go with Jean, or send her with some nurse. He must see her, and that at once—I promised it."

John said the last words with slow emphasis, looking hard at Jean, who was now nervously folding up her letter.

Mrs. Selby held up her hands in dismay.

"Seth lying sick at Marathon! Dear, dear, how misfortunate! Of course I will go. It is awkward

about the chicks, but they must rub along some way. My sister is come with her husband to stay a week, and she will see to them and things here. How to get there quick enough—that is the only point. 'Tis so far to Marathon—twenty miles at least.”

“There is a train in an hour. I must go back by it, and could help you pack your traps along if it is too soon. Otherwise, I will fetch the team from the farm and drive you.”

Mrs. Selby gave a complacent little chuckle.

“That is our John, every time. Sparing nothing when his mind is made up. We will catch that train. Your horses shall not come out for us. I will manage. Now, tell me what ails the boy while I get some lunch. Nay,” as John protested, “but you must have some right now. Jean, mebbe you had better go and pack up your things.”

Mrs. Selby, for once in her life, had taken command of the situation. Jean, who had been listening with downcast eyes, approached John and looked up swiftly and then away again.

“I want to thank you,” she said in a whisper. “But we need not trouble you to go again to Marathon.”

John's face did not change.

“There is no trouble in it. I came because I reckoned his life depended upon it. I shall go back because I said I would.”

He turned to Mrs. Selby; but paused to say to Jean—

“I would have you remember that he wrote that letter before I met him. I do not say this to change

your opinion of me. Nothing now will do that. But I wish you should know the truth."

All this puzzled Mrs. Selby desperately, but she could ask no questions until she made an excuse to leave John eating his lunch, and go to Jean's room.

"Jennie, what has been going on 'tween John and you? I never saw him look so stormy. What have you said?"

"I asked questions—I said what I had no right to. 'Twas unjust and mean. There, mother, leave me alone, *please*. I cannot talk of anything. I wish we could go this minute to Marathon. Why, Seth may be dying all those miles away."

Mrs. Selby soothed her.

"He'll be far from that, dearie. Trust me. Men, even the best, like John, is always fussed and flustered where there is illness. They lose their heads like frightened hens unless they be doctors. Now, Seth, I take it, has lost blood and nerve through hard times, and so he's wilted considerable, and we must go to him. Pack you trunk with clothes for a week, and tell your father about it—leave all else to me."

Jean meekly obeyed. For the first time for many years she was content, even glad, to take the second place.

Mrs. Selby kept her word, and with Jean, very pale and distressed, arrived at the depot five minutes before the train was due. John was waiting for them, and finding them a comfortable seat in one of the cars, departed immediately for another, and was not seen again until Marathon was reached. At

the hotel Mrs. Selby found that rooms had been engaged for her by John, by telegraph. The only difficulty left for her was to overcome the doctor, who was awaiting their arrival in a very spirituous condition. Mrs. Selby, however, after a brief examination of Seth, made short work of the medical man. She listened in silence to his advice, asked for his bill, paid it, and showed him the door.

All the time this was going on Jean sat by Seth's bedside holding his hand and trying to smile, and feeling so wretched and full of self-reproach that at the least provocation she would have burst into tears. Seth, to her eyes, seemed dying, and with a bitter pang Jean felt that it was she who had sent him to his death. His cheeks were sunken, his complexion dull and unhealthy, he was a mere skeleton of his former self. The only comfort Jean found was the brightness which came into his eyes at the sight of her face, and his look of peace as he lay holding her hand, basking in the content her presence gave him. Seth was perfectly happy. He suffered little pain now, and the rest of body and mind and heart that came with Jean, with the care and nourishment he had already received, had much revived him. He only felt tired and a little faint. Neither of them thought for the moment of John, who, finding that Mrs. Selby was more than equal to the doctor, and all other matters having been arranged, took his departure without entering the sick-room again.

Seth was able to resume his journey in a week. When he asked the hotel-keeper, with many inward qualms, for his bill, that gentleman said that his

charge was nothing. He was pleased, he said, to do his humble share in the defence of his country by "helping one of her gallantest boys," at the expression of which beautiful sentiment Seth thanked him warmly, and Jean gave him her sweetest smile. Mrs. Selby alone had suspicions concerning the good man's exceeding effusiveness. She remembered that when she went to look for him soon after their arrival, she had seen him in earnest conversation with John, who walked hurriedly away. With characteristic prudence, however, Mrs. Selby kept her ideas to herself.

Seth received a small ovation the day he arrived at Chippewa. A large number of his old scholars were at the depot, raising shrill cheers as the train came in, and fighting hotly for the privilege of carrying his trunk to the store; while all the unoccupied members of the community looked on and vigorously applauded. The next day invitations poured in from citizens who had sons or brothers in the army, and wished to ask numberless questions. This popularity was pleasant at first, but it had a seamy side. He could not show his face in the street without some one he had never spoken to before stopping him and inquiring anxiously after his health, and wanting to know whether, from his experience, he judged the preparations the Government were making to increase the army would prove sufficient for their purpose. The worst of it was, everybody took it for granted that he was to return to the front as soon as his health was re-established; Jean alone said nothing. Seth rather congratulated himself upon her silence. Had she nourished any serious intention

of opposing his idea, or even had a strong feeling against it, she was the last person to have kept it to herself. As time went on, however, and his strength began to return, Seth found the attitude of his own mind changing. The air was full of war, not mere talk and speculation, but stern reality. Men were enlisting now who had never thought of doing so four months ago. Bull Run, while it winnowed out mere sentiment and silenced the boasters, brought to the surface all that was manly and true in the North. The Government, with Lincoln at its head, stood firm as a rock, and the most enthusiastic Southerner paused and sobered down as the news of what the Yanks were doing spread through the South.

One evening, when alone with Jean, Seth said, with a sudden laugh—

“Jeannie, where’s the note I wrote you from the cars? The one John brought for me. Have you burnt it?”

“Of course not.”

“Give it to me, dear, then. I will.”

She turned to look at him, a brightness in her eyes, a joy in her face he had not seen for a long time, and which gave him a sudden pang.

“Seth, do you mean that you are—that you do not feel what you told me then?”

“You have just precisely struck it, sweet; only you might put it more strongly. When I put those words to paper, I was the most sick and sorry cuss that ever lived—ugh—I was limp as a drowning fly. Meaner than dirt. I tell you I take back every word of that letter, and all I said to John next day. To prove it,

I may inform you, mistress mine, that if my arrangements can be fixed up as I have figured them out this afternoon, I'll be with the boys in the Shenandoah valley within two weeks. What do you say to that?"

He held her at arm's length, the better to catch the full effect his words might make.

"Oh, Seth, I am so thankful—so glad. I do not know how to express what I feel. I was determined I would never ask your plans; nor, after what you have suffered, would I ever urge you to go again—but if you think *this!* Well, I think it is perfect. It will be very hard to part with you so soon, but it is just what a man like you would want to do. *You* could not fail where your country needed you."

"My country?"—he gave a little laugh, with a touch of bitterness. "I am not sure that my country has very much to do with it. I rather think it has been a person who shall be nameless. I grant she has said nothing; but her face has not been silent. Speaking soberly, love, it has come to me lately in a way it never came before—either I would go to the war or set you free to find a man who would."

"Nonsense, Seth," she cried vehemently. "Please do not say those things; you do yourself injustice. I have been nothing. If I had not been in the world you would have done the right; I know you would."

"I do not think so," he said slowly; "no, I do not. I am not weaker than the average—not so weak, I hope, as some. But to sacrifice all that is most precious—you, and our future home, for duty, I could not do it. Some men could—a few—but I do

not belong to that company, and the sooner you realize that the better. I will go to the war; but if you told me to stop at home and marry you, I would let my country go. I am speaking the plain truth; how do you like it?"

He smiled, then sighed, and looked absently out of the window. His mind was full of John this evening. Their meeting at Marathon had proved to him beyond a doubt of the noble stuff of which that man was made, and a vague desire troubled him to make Jean see what he saw now. Yet the wish was not easy of fulfilment, and Seth let it drop again, and gave himself up to the pleasure her answer afforded him.

"I will not have you say such absurdly foolish things. You, who have never spared yourself, who have bled in the cause, and dare, with open eyes, to do so again—to say you cannot do your duty! You make me wild, Seth. Find me a man who has done more, or so much. That you once felt differently is nothing; I could never bring that up as worth a thought. You were sick: now you are yourself again. If you thought what was foolish, I did worse, for I was unjust."

"You? Why?"

"I did wrong to a good man."

Jean, also, was thinking of John to-night.

CHAPTER X.

IN the United States work is spelt with a capital W. The business competition in the towns, and the strain in the country of producing the largest possible crops at the smallest possible cost, keeps the brains and bodies of men at full stretch all the year round. Holidays are or were almost unknown. Under such circumstances it is not surprising to find that in charitable enterprises women usually take the first place. The names of men appear in prospectuses, and men grace the chair at public meetings, for men have money. But there have been few philanthropic schemes, large or small, in the States for the past forty years in which women have not borne the chief responsibility and held the power. In Chippewa this was as much the case as elsewhere. Whether it was a soup kitchen in a hard winter, or the management and distribution of supplies for the wounded at the time of the war, such matters were under one manager, and only one, Mrs. Haniman, the minister's wife. Mrs. Haniman did not work alone. She always had a committee, of which Luke Selby was usually chairman; and out of that committee Mrs. Haniman contrived to get both work and money; but she was its guiding spirit, and no person, or persons combined,

ever dreamed of questioning any action that she might think fit to take. It goes without saying that Mrs. Haniman was a woman of character, and a born organizer. But she was a great deal more than this. Public life and public work, of one sort or another, was the breath of her existence; and it was her firm conviction that the highest destiny for any woman was a commanding influence in public affairs. Mrs. Haniman was childless, and, though by no means a child-hater, it was her custom to point out to all who came under her influence that while there were undoubtedly certain women who were more fitted for the care and up-bringing of families than for anything else, every woman who had brains, energy, and ambition should consider her domestic affairs secondary to the welfare of the community at large. This doctrine she preached in season and out of season, more especially to young girls, with results that were, at times, astonishing, and not invariably what she approved herself. Her aptest pupil was Jean. Since Jean's childhood, despite mild protests from Mrs. Selby and very vigorous ones from Mrs. Burletson, Mrs. Haniman had steadily worked upon the ambitious side of the girl's nature, and as Jean grew to womanhood a desire for public work and interest in the welfare of those around her—in the mass—became her ruling passion. In all things she had been Mrs. Haniman's loyal disciple, until at length her own native energy and will enabled her to strike out a path of her own. Since the fall of Fort Sumter, for instance, Jean had out-done even Mrs. Haniman in her enthusiasm for the war, and exercised a far

greater influence in inducing men to volunteer—thanks, perhaps, to her youth and good looks—than her teacher. No one was more pleased at this than Mrs. Haniman. There was not a particle of petty pride in her nature. Her only regret was that there was not a score of Jeans. Mrs. Haniman was one of the warmest approvers of Jean's engagement to Seth. She had known John from childhood, and was too shrewd not to read the character of the man, in spite of all his gentleness. Jean, from Mrs. Haniman's point of view, could never grow to the full stature Providence intended for women if she married a man stronger than herself. As Seth's wife, she would take the lead and be in a woman's rightful place—in command. All that Jean needed now, in Mrs. Haniman's opinion, was full scope for her energies; and no sooner were the ranks of the volunteer regiments filled up, and the feelings and patriotism of every man in the neighbourhood of Chippewa who could reasonably be expected to enlist, sufficiently worked upon, than the creation of a new work, in which Jean should take a leading part, began to agitate Mrs. Haniman's mind, and the day after Seth departed again for the war she called at the store to propound it.

It was ten o'clock in the morning, and, to Mrs. Haniman's surprise, Jean was in the kitchen cleaning the stove. It turned out that Mrs. Selby, after rising as usual at five, had been obliged to return to her bed with a severe headache, and that Jean had stepped into the breach. Upon the confusion caused by this untoward incident Mrs. Haniman came—a tall, com-

manding woman, with a fresh-coloured face, aquiline features, prominent blue eyes, and a deep voice. It was a fine voice, and musical, but it was marred by a curious monotony of tone. It was said by many that while Mrs. Haniman's opinions were always distinctly and impressively delivered, she was apt not to listen to those of other people.

"My dear, this is very unfortunate for you," she said, after she had been told about Mrs. Selby's illness. "I have come to see you about a matter of great importance, and to which you must give me your undivided attention."

Jean looked despairingly at her hands.

"I should like to hear about it of all things, but you can see how I am placed. I must fly round all I know, or there will be a scrap dinner for father, and bread and molasses for the children. It just happens, of course, because mother is sick there is nothing cooked in the house. I could manage an hour this afternoon."

Mrs. Haniman smiled. Her face did not look so pleasant when she smiled, perhaps because smiling was not natural to her.

"My dear," she said, laying her umbrella upon the kitchen table, "I would not have come at this hour if any other would have suited me. I must write twenty letters at least before five o'clock. No; we will talk now. I will tell your father myself, on my way out, that he must be satisfied with cold fare to-day; and, as for the children, how many a poor man's child has to be content all the year round with hunks of bread and molasses?

My business is too important for delay. Listen here."

Mrs. Haniman drew from a neat leather bag a letter, written by a lady in Chicago, the wife of a newspaper editor, and a woman of position and power, one of the first organizers of the great "Sanitary Commission." Some one had told her of Mrs. Haniman, and she wrote to suggest that a sub-depot should be established at Chippewa for the collection and distribution of comforts and necessities for the wounded soldiers; and she wanted to know whether Mrs. Haniman would organize, and make herself responsible for, the management of this depot. The writer concluded by cordially inviting Mrs. Haniman to visit Chicago, to talk over and arrange all the details of the scheme.

"I am bound to go," Mrs. Haniman said; "but I can only see this thing through if you will help me. No one woman will ever be able to take charge of all that will come if the idea gets hold upon our folk—which I am sure it will. No one but you has the brains and the backbone to run it. We will have no men fooling around. They may give—they shall give—money; but the work will be too responsible for them. Will you take it?"

Jean's answer lay in the brightness of her face.

"Yes, indeed. Yes, a hundred times. But am I smart enough and strong enough? You must not judge me by yourself. Tell me what it amounts to."

"Why, just this," Mrs. Haniman answered, with the precision of a woman of business, none of her enthusiasm visible either in face or manner, "we have

sent the boys to the war, you know, we women. Warfare means the giving of wounds and death. It is our duty, I take it, our particular duty, to see that everything is done that can be done for our wounded men. Of course there are surgeons and hospitals; but, as might have been expected, the doctors are careless and worse, and the hospitals not fit for sick cattle. How is this to be changed? Who is to change it? You have the answer in this letter. The women, the women of the Union. Not one or two, but *all*, working together in a compact organization. We will have first to make appeals; but that will be easy. Read the account of what goes on in hospital and in camp. The railways carry troops to the front and leave them there, after a journey of twenty-four hours, without a bite of food or a drop of water. When the food comes it is often bad, and only fit for a hog. As for the sick, the boys are writing to say that the hospitals are so miserable that they won't go into them. You remember what Seth told us about the difficulty he found in getting water when he was sick, and how that was dirty—yet that was a hospital in Washington. The sheds at the front they call by the name of hospitals are in the hands of doctors, many of whom drink, I am told; while, as for nurses, they will have none yet."

"A nurse!" Jean cried. "That is what I would like to be best of all. A nurse at the front—within sound of the guns."

Mrs. Haniman smiled her peculiar smile.

"Is that your ambition? You will get it, I hope; but wait a bit. There is work at home to your hand.

I am told the men—these doctors—say nothing is required; that hospitals for forty where there are a thousand sick; stores of food rotting away where there is no one to eat it; starvation, or near it, where the army lays, is right and reasonable. Why do they say it? Because only politics, fighting, and dollar-hunting interests men. It is time we women took hold. That is what this lady means by a Sanitary Commission. Every big town in our State will have its sub-depot for stores, and form a local aid society of women, which will be directly in communication with the Commission. We will find out what things are most needed, appeal for them, pack them, and start 'em for the front. There will be medicines, and warm clothing, and any kind of useful, comforting things folk have to give. There is the work. Will you take it up with me?"

"Most willingly."

"I will write to-day, then, and go to Chicago next week, leaving the work I have in hand just now with you. When I get back we will start a store-room and committee. Now I must go."

Mrs. Haniman rose with a brisk nod, and walked away thoroughly satisfied with herself and her morning's work. Luke was of a different opinion when he found a dry and scanty dinner awaiting him; the children complained sadly at bread and molasses—all Jean could find for them; and Mrs. Selby wept bitterly in her room upstairs. She had felt unwell for some weeks, and was haunted by a gnawing anxiety about herself. Her doctor refused to say what was the matter. "It may be only temporary," he said, "we must

wait and see. Meantime keep you quiet, and take things easily." But his looks had belied his soothing words, and the events of this day were a climax to Mrs. Selby's woes. What would happen to her little ones if she were to become unable to care for their comfort and well-being? It was clear to her that Jean was not to be depended upon.

This opinion might have been modified if Mrs. Selby had seen the tremendous efforts Jean made to provide an extra good supper for her family this evening, and put the house in order. But she did not see it, and the next day rose from her bed, despite the doctor, and quietly turned Jean out. Jean hardly noticed at the time how ill her mother looked. Her thoughts by day and her dreams by night were of the Sanitary Commission and the best possible way of helping to bring comfort and relief to thousands of heroic suffering men. She wrote daily to Mrs. Haniman, and received long letters in return, full of accounts of the great doings in Chicago. Upon Mrs. Haniman's return the work began, and early and late Jean sat upon a straight-backed office chair, and wrote letters by the hour, or was on her feet the whole day in the store-room, unpacking and repacking boxes of clothing, inspecting canned fruit and canned meats, and sorting out baskets of toys and boxes of candy, these last sent mostly by children to amuse the hospital patients' leisure hours. It was hard work, and became harder as the volume of the business grew with rapid strides, and to send "some-thin' away to the boys" became a ruling passion in every Union household, regardless of whether that

“somethin’” was likely to be of any use. The self-denial and devotion of the poorer folk was very touching. Here the wife of a labourer brought her husband’s spare shirts, with the remark that “he’d said they could go, and he’d chance gettin’ more come winter-time;” there an old couple handed in a pair of fat chickens “to be biled for broth; they are all we can spare—we ain’t got no money to give.” One small boy, the raggedest of street urchins, contributed five cents a week regularly, and when told that he should buy himself a pair of shoes first, for he was bare-foot, replied with scorn, “Shucks! what I give yer I spend on terbacker; but I reckon them boys want it more than me. I’ll do without it till the Rebs climb down!” Queer articles of clothing would arrive sometimes, from boot-laces and hair-combs to knee-breeches and dress-shirts. Delicacies of a perishable nature, such as honey and fresh fruits, came in from long distances, and caused much tribulation to the committee. On the other hand, grateful letters from “the boys” were delightful to read; the demand from the army increased faster than the supply; while the authorities became less and less antagonistic to the scheme as they found that its indefatigable promoters were doing their best to be business-like and practical, and induce the public to send what was needed at the front, instead of what it did not want at home.

But these things were more easily promised than performed. Jean often said to Mrs. Haniman that until she took up this work she had not a notion that there were so many foolish people in the world as she

now found in northern Wisconsin. When the committee gained experience, it began to find that firm refusal and prompt return of all unnecessary and useless gifts was essential to the credit of the Commission; and the storm of indignation from the donors of these gifts which fell upon Jean, as the committee's secretary, was very wearing. Then Jean worked far too hard. All through the rest of the summer she laboured without respite or holiday. Even when winter came, and she caught a chill, she refused to take any care of herself, and developed a cough, which lasted until the spring, and gave her mother much anxiety. Yet nothing was to be done, for no persuasions or arguments could convince Jean that her health was of any importance compared with her work. Mrs. Haniman never rested; why should she? The boys were fighting and suffering in Virginia; it would be mean and cowardly to relax efforts on their behalf at home. Mrs. Selby, in her distress and perplexity, was so seriously concerned about the matter that she consulted her husband. But she received no sympathy there.

"My good Martha, you are over-anxious. I have my eyes open, and can see Jean is not so stout as she was, but my belief is that the work ain't at the bottom of it. She is not happy. She is restless all the time; the work is good so far, for it employs her mind. My notion is quite a different one from yours. It is in my head, between ourselves, that if the Lord in His mercy should see fit to send that boy Seth to a better world, Jean, when the shock has passed, would be a different girl. I will have nothing, any-

way, said against this work. It is the best the women in this country ever tried to do. By-the-by, have you heard that John Burletson is selling horses to the Government? That man, my dear, is coining money. I always knew he would. As to Jean, we have no reason to be dissatisfied with our little girl."

Luke himself had not indeed. He had never done so brisk a trade as since the day "the Sanitary" was established. Mrs. Selby after this went on her way in silence anxiously watching Jean, and bearing with dumb patience her own slowly but surely increasing ill-health. She made no complaint, and only her doctor knew how much she suffered; though, thanks to a marvellous constitution, she was able, and would be for a long time, to do her part for her children and her house.

A day came at length when even Jean felt that her present work was undermining health and nerve without adequate results, and decided to give it up. The decision, which cost her many sleepless nights, she determined to communicate first of all to Mrs. Haniman. Mrs. Haniman, somewhat to Jean's surprise, received the announcement as if she had expected it, though with a deep sigh.

"You have been our right hand, my dear, and we can ill spare you; but if it has to be it must. What shall you do with your free hours?"

"I am going to train for a nurse, and go to the front as soon as I may."

"What! Go to the war?" And Mrs. Haniman looked at her in blank astonishment.

"Yes; I was reading accounts of the need they

had for nurses, and how many girls were training, and I felt that I must go too. It has been an idea of mine for a very long time. I hoped you would have approved."

"I do—I do, decidedly," Mrs. Haniman replied with emphasis, yet with a reservation in her tone Jean could not understand. "But what has your father to say about it, and your mother? Your mother most of all?"

"I have not told them yet, but I do not expect any difficulty there. They never interfere with any plans of mine."

Mrs. Haniman coughed and assented, then absently played with her pen and remained silent as if in deep thought. This proposition of Jean's placed her in a very awkward position. The girl's plan would answer her most cherished purpose, for the work of the committee would be strengthened tenfold by the presence of an agent on the spot. On the other hand, not twenty-four hours ago she had made a promise which it was incumbent upon her to keep, and which charged her to say certain things that might entirely change Jean's plans. After a pause she remarked—

"I don't know any one who would make a better nurse. I think it is the career that fits you best. But the opinion has been expressed to me, and I have promised that you should know it, that your mother is too sick for you to leave your home or even to stay by us for the Sanitary."

"Mother—sick? She has never told me! What is the matter?"

"I cannot say," Mrs. Haniman said with a curi-

ous reticence. "I should not have remarked it myself. I tell you what I am told."

"Who told you?"

"A friend who knows, or thinks she knows, a great deal about such things. I hardly like mentioning her name after what has passed."

"I must know it, please."

"John Burletson's mother."

Jean flushed fiercely.

"Did you ask for her authority? Why does she interfere? I don't mean to be disrespectful; but why did she not come herself and—and what business is it of hers anyway?"

Mrs. Haniman pursed her lips and shook her head.

"Mrs. Burletson said to me——" she went on.

"Thank you, I would rather not hear what she said," Jean interposed warmly. "I do not put any weight at all upon evidence that comes so very second hand. If you know of your own knowledge something about mother that I do not, I will be glad if you will tell me; but not what Mrs. Burletson says."

"I have told you," Mrs. Haniman rejoined in her monotonous tone, "that I know nothing. It is what I have been informed."

"Then that settles it. If anything had been really wrong, mother would have let me know. We need not go into it further."

Mrs. Haniman played with her pen again, then she said—

"What, my dear, is it your purpose to do?"

"The course you approved, which I had deter-

mined upon. I can assure you I have quite made up my mind."

Soon after this Jean went home. But Mrs. Haniman did no more work that evening.

"I did my duty," she said to herself many times. "I could not tell her all because she would not listen, and she will do more good by being away—good to herself and to others. Why should her life be absorbed with the care of children and a sick mother? The future of our work here is assured. I have done right—I have done right."

CHAPTER XI.

THE next day Mrs. Haniman put off two engagements, and left unanswered a formidable mass of correspondence to make time for a visit to Mrs. Burletson.

"I wanted you to know, Sarah," she said, "and from my own lips, that I spoke to Jean last night about her mother."

Mrs. Burletson nodded approvingly.

"That was right. What did she say?"

Mrs. Haniman folded her hands in her lap, and slightly but distinctly raised her voice.

"You will remember that Jean's mind and heart have been bent since she was a child upon a life of devotion to her fellow-creatures. When she came last night to resign her position in the Sanitary——"

"She did so!" Mrs. Burletson exclaimed. "Good girl; noble girl. I have misjudged her."

Mrs. Haniman coughed.

"Wait one moment. Jean has resigned, and with my full approval, so that she may receive the necessary training as a nurse before she goes to serve in hospital at the seat of war."

All this Mrs. Haniman said in her deepest and most impressive manner, as if anxious that her listen-

er should not fail to understand the full significance of every word. Mrs. Burletson's teeth closed with a snap.

"What did you say to her then?"

"I kept my promise. I told her what you had said about her mother. She asked who had spoken so. I mentioned your name. What she said then I will not repeat. Her last words were, 'I will go to the war; I have quite made up my mind.'"

"Did you tell her what Dr. Selliger said?"

"I mentioned what you said. I have not seen him."

"You know what he told me."

"Maybe I do, Sarah; but you must remember that since John saw fit to draw back from volunteering, the mention of his name or yours has a peculiarly contrary effect upon Jean. The more I brought you in, the more set she became to follow out her own idea."

"My son, Martha Haniman, never drew back, and you know it perfectly well. They tried to push him when he refused to go."

Mrs. Haniman gave a deprecating wave of the hand.

"I have not come to argue about John."

"No," Mrs. Burletson said; "there you are wise. Now tell me again. Jean is going to leave home. What do her folks say?"

"When Jean has told me her mind," Mrs. Haniman said complacently, "I have never known her parents change it."

"No," Mrs. Burletson said, with an ominous

quietness of tone; "the child has had a bad education. Martha Selby never disciplined her any, or tried to teach—except by example—self-denial and self-control. Yet I am disappointed. I knew Jean was blind and headstrong; but that she could ever turn out heartless and wicked, I would never have believed—if you had not told me."

Mrs. Haniman tapped her foot impatiently upon the floor.

"Such talk is pure foolishness. Jean has done right. I have written this day to a friend of mine in Washington who will advise in her training. You forget yourself, Sarah."

"I say wicked," Mrs. Burletson repeated, her voice still unnaturally quiet; "I say it again. Her mother is dying, though very slowly. She may live yet for years, but inch by inch her life is leaving her. Yet in the face of that—of death itself—that girl can go away. You told Jean, of course, that her mother *was* dying? Answer me."

Mrs. Haniman rose with dignity to take her leave.

"I have said I did my duty. That is enough."

"Answer my question. Did you tell her the whole truth, or did you conceal any of it? No empty phrases; you are too fond of them. Tell me what you said."

"I have told you all."

"Then you concealed from Jean her mother's danger? I have done the child a wrong; thank God, I have. But what shall I say to you, her friend whom she has followed for good and for evil—aye, for evil

—all her life? No, you are not going yet; sit down again. I have more upon my tongue. Jean in herself is nothing to me now. The war craze, the glib talk of false advisers, turned her head, which never was well-balanced, until she chose to scorn my John, a man worth ten—though I, his mother, say it—of the one she promises to marry. From the time I knew this I have not cared to see her face. But her mother is my friend. You despise that woman. I happen to know she is one of the best living; and if it is in me she shall not be sacrificed to the mad whimsies of a war-sick girl. I may fail; likely I will. I am a woman of years and infirm, and my temper is more infirm than my limbs; and young folk want guiding with a gentle hand. But whatever comes, I have learnt something I never thought to know. I have seen a woman professing the Christian religion, who goes forth in public print as a philanthropist—you, Martha Haniman—act in a way the poorest of your husband's flock would be ashamed to act. What do you say? It is for the best? Jean's place is at the war? What has that to do with it? Did you tell the truth? You know you did not. Go home to your chamber. Humble your proud heart before the God that made you; then say whether your conscience approves a deliberate concealment from this girl that her mother is stricken with a mortal disease. Go, and let it be a long time before you come within my doors again."

The old lady rose to her feet, her bent figure quivering, and her eyes flashing fire. Mrs. Haniman tried to speak, but at an imperious gesture from Mrs.

Burletson shrank back, and went away without a word.

When John came home from work that evening he found his mother lying down, worn out. She told him what had passed, for they had no secrets from one another. Her eyes were softer now.

"I am not quite sure," she said, in a doubtful tone, "whether I did not drive my words too hard. I expected to see her turn upon me, but she left."

John laughed.

"I should say, if you were to ask for my opinion, that this was all Mrs. Haniman had a chance to do. I would wager she was pleased to be in the fresh air, and I doubt whether her ears are not tingling now. Don't fret one little bit," he added stoutly; "you have not said too much. I would give anything to have it in me to command such words as yours when I feel hot. But I cannot do it. Those which come to me are poor, and generally stick in my throat."

"Martha Haniman is a good woman at heart," Mrs. Burletson said; "but oh, the harm, John, she has done your girl"

"My girl! mother?"

"Boy, how thoughtless of me! No," she said in a different tone; "not yours, because not worthy."

"There you are quite wrong."

He spoke with some emphasis; but Mrs. Burletson was not in a mood to be contradicted.

"I say I am right, and I know it. Jean is not worthy to be your wife."

"It is not just to speak so of her."

"I speak of what I know."

"You are hard, mother. Jean has done more than any one person for the boys at the war. When I saw her yesterday her face was as white as paper. Even now she gives this up to go where all the ghastly horrors are, and work harder still among wounds, and disease, and death. Mother," and his voice trembled with pent-up feeling, "it is wonderful to me to see what strength of mind there is in little Jean. She has taught me what a woman can do, as you have taught me what a woman ought to be. If she goes to the war——"

"She has not gone yet," Mrs. Burletson said, between her teeth.

"How can it be stopped now?"

"To-morrow morning, son John, if you are not too busy, I will ask you to drive me to town."

"Town, mother! You have not been so far this six months."

"Town, John. First we will go to Jabez Selliger. I told you what he said about Mrs. Selby. To-morrow he shall write that down. Then, sonny, we drive to the store."

"You intend speaking to Jean?"

"She will have all my mind, John, and all the doctor's knowledge. If that is not enough to stop her, God have mercy upon her soul, and on Martha Haniman's—though that I very much doubt."

John fidgeted in his chair.

"Jean—Jean has a high spirit, mother."

Mrs. Burletson laughed.

"My dearest boy, I know that well. I will keep my temper, and hold my tongue, you may be sure.

It is too serious. Besides, Jean, yet awhile at least, is not so far gone as Martha Haniman."

When Mrs. Burletson saw Jean next day she noticed many unexpected changes in the young face, and her voice was softer and more gentle than she had intended it to be.

"Excuse me, my dear, for intruding this way on your work. But I am an ailing old woman, and had to come the first day I could, and I have reasons for seeing you that are very urgent."

Jean murmured some inaudible reply. She was flushed and nervous, though she tried to appear quite calm.

Mrs. Burletson looked at the girl a moment, then took her hand and drew her to a chair beside her.

"You guess what I am come about. Is not that so?"

"You mean my mother."

"Yes."

"I hear you think," Jean went on, as Mrs. Burletson maintained a diplomatic silence, "that she is sick, too sick to be left alone to care for them all here."

Mrs. Burletson pressed the hand she held.

"My dear, what I may think is of little consequence. Tell me what you feel."

"I spoke to mother this morning. She said nothing worth mentioning was the matter, and urged me to go away. She promised if she became very sick to let me know. I told her I could not leave home else."

"Nothing the matter, did she say?" Mrs. Bur-

letson answered. "You shall see what Dr. Sellinger thinks. I made him write it down for you—for your eyes alone."

She handed the girl an open letter, and Jean read it with white shocked face.

"Cancer! I had no idea of that. It is a terrible disease."

"The worst," Mrs. Burletson said slowly, "the most painful there is."

"Is there no cure at all?"

"You see what he says—none."

Jean looked again at the letter, and remained silent for some minutes, Mrs. Burletson narrowly watching her, and trying to read her thoughts.

"I am much obliged to you. You were very good to come to me."

The tone in which these words were spoken was quite simple and sincere, but they bore an unmistakable meaning, and Mrs. Burletson rose to take her leave.

"It is a sore trial, Jean."

"If only I had been better to her in the past," the girl said bitterly; "she has worked and suffered alone, while I, who might have shared her burdens, have never done my duty once—not once. I can see it now, when it is too late. I should have seen it long ago."

Jean's voice was dry and hard, and though Mrs. Burletson's heart leapt up in hope at the girl's self-accusing words, there was something repellent in her manner that puzzled the old lady.

"Nothing is ever too late," she said softly. "It

will be months—maybe a year or more—before the end comes, Jean. That is a long time.”

“You call it long? After all these years I have lived for myself, it seems just nothing. And now, when I have the will, I find I have not the power. I cannot nurse, I cannot cook, I cannot sew to amount to anything. She has done it, killing herself for all of us. She will do it now to the end, in spite of any one. But,” recollecting herself, “I am keeping you standing. Good-bye.”

Mrs. Burletson did not move.

“Tell me first, child, what you are going to do.”

There was a ring of the old imperiousness in these words; Jean did not notice it, however. Her face was full of pain and distress.

“I? Why hunt everywhere I know for a woman who can do for mother what I cannot do—win her confidence; some one she will trust. It must be a very good woman, so good that she may be hard to find, but I must find her some way.”

She made a movement toward the door, but Mrs. Burletson did not see it.

“Jean, I cannot heft the meaning of your words. Do you mean that your mother will not have you—prefers a stranger?”

“Just that. Oh, she is right. Lying awake last night, I saw it all. I deserve nothing less, terribly bitter as it is.”

“Tell me what she said—every word.”

“It was not much. I had thought, before I knew how bad she was—how I could be so blind I cannot think—of going away to be a nurse at the war. I told

her and father at supper yesterday. Father got angry—real mad—and said things that made me obstinate. Father and I have not understood one another lately.”

She sighed and went on.

“Then mother spoke as I had never heard her speak before to father. She said I was fitted for that, and go I should, if I rested and got strong first; and that he need not mention the expense of training, as she would pay it. This startled him, and he said no more. But before I went to bed, I told mother that she looked sick, and that I would not leave her. At this she seemed to get more mad at me than she was with father. First she said what I told you, that she did not feel really very ill; then she said if it were so, and she had to be laid right up, she would rather have any one to mind the children and nurse her than me. I told her I would learn it all, but she would not listen, and, finally, said she was convinced it was not in me. She could never trust me, she declared, no matter what my intentions might be. ‘Go to the war,’ she said, ‘an’ nurse soldiers. If you stayed at home and had me and the house on your mind, you’d be like some caged bird.’ I tried to show her it should not be so, but she would not see it. There—you have it all.”

Mrs. Burletson took both Jean’s hands in hers and beamed at her.

“My dear, I thank you for this confidence. It is very precious to me. Tell me, now, what you feel yourself. You have given me your mother’s words—God help her—now give me your own.”

Jean tried to release her hands.

"I cannot," she said brusquely. "Why should you trouble about me at all, I cannot think. It is mother who interests you. Oh, I know well what you think of me."

"Do you? I guess you do not. But that is not the question. I ask you, for your mother's sake, to tell me now what you wish to happen to yourself? Do you feel content to go to the war after getting her a help? That is the question I will have answered before I go."

Jean shook her head, and again tried to draw her hands away; but Mrs. Burletson held them fast.

"Jean, child, whom I loved once—whom I love *now*—tell me your thoughts for your own sake."

"I feel"—Jean's voice was hardly more than a whisper, and she spoke with white lips—"I feel if mother would have me now she would never regret it. I should have loved nursing the boys, but that is nothing to me compared to being with mother. I want to be the daughter she deserves to have. But it is too late. I have been tried; she has found me wanting, and it breaks my heart—it breaks my heart."

Tears came now and choked her. Then she controlled herself and wiped her eyes.

"I am sorry to give way so; why did you let me? You must have wanted to go long since."

"Child," the old lady said, kissing the tear-stained face, "I am going right now to see your mother. Wait here. Do not stir one step until she comes to you."

CHAPTER XII.

"You have come to tell me about your plans? I expected you before." Mrs. Haniman spoke with a formality of manner she had never shown toward Jean.

"I would have called in the afternoon, but this my morning was interrupted, and I had to make up time. You know, I am sure you know, I would not keep away from you."

"This morning," said Mrs. Haniman, considering—"this morning I saw Mrs. Burletson in town. Was that to see you?"

"Yes. Was it not good of her?" and Jean's face brightened in a way Mrs. Haniman could not fail to see.

"What had she to tell you?" The words came quickly, as though Mrs. Haniman were a little out of breath.

"A great deal," Jean said; "more—far more than I had any idea of. Afterward mother and I talked everything through. Mrs. Haniman, I am not going to the war."

"Have you—quite made up your mind?"

Jean looked a little foolish.

"You think me weak and changeable. I do not

wonder. But I am sure I have decided rightly now. I am very sorry to disappoint your plans."

Mrs. Haniman was silent for a moment.

"Now it is coming," Jean thought, and braced herself for a storm.

"Your mother, then, is very sick?" Mrs. Haniman said.

"She can never be better," Jean answered, with a break in her voice, though she tried to keep it steady.

Mrs. Haniman cleared her throat.

"Martha—your mother—has been good to you, Jean—the best of mothers."

"The very best."

"She is a true Christian; yet some have said her mind was narrow, her ideas poor and few. I do not think"—again Mrs. Haniman cleared her throat—"I say I do not think that any one will ever speak that way again."

"Not in my hearing," Jean exclaimed.

"Neither in mine. There are some of us who might learn more from your mother than they know themselves. But you wish to go. Well, it is my opinion, now, that you are right. The Sanitary will miss you most of all. But you do well. Tell your mother, my dear, with my love, that I said that, will you? She might like to know."

The news of Mrs. Selby's illness, and of Jean's resignation of her official duties, was a great shock to Chippewa. "Mother" Selby had been looked upon as one to whom sickness was unknown, and for Jean to take to domestic work was a nine days' wonder.

Every one, however, was full of sympathy, and had Mrs. Selby accepted all the offers of help she received, Jean, so far as the work of the house went, might have sat in idleness all day long. So many of the poor women Mrs. Selby had befriended wished to do something. One offered to scrub the floor, another to "bathe the little ones Saturdays," a third to do the mending. As Mrs. Selby said, with tears in her eyes, "You never know how good folk really are until your hard times come."

Times were hard for all in Chippewa. The year of 1861 had worn to its close; the summer of 1862 had come, and there was no peace nor likelihood of it. The grim war-clouds which gathered over the land were deeper and more threatening than ever, and men went to store or field with faces which grew more anxious day by day. Not only had nearly every family a father, husband, or brother at the war who were dropping fast from wounds and disease, but a large proportion of these soldiers had been breadwinners for others before they volunteered, and to the anxiety for their safety was added the pinch of distress at home. This was balanced, to a certain extent, by the increased value of labour, and many a strong, brave-hearted woman went into workshop or factory, and not only succeeded in keeping the wolf from the door, but sent out stores of comforts to "the boys." Mrs. Haniman could tell of numbers of instances where poor widows, with little mouths of their own to feed, brought offerings of comforters and stockings, made with their own hands after the work of the day was over. But not all women were strong;

and there were the sick and aged. These helpless ones suffered terribly in such a time as this, when the resources of all charitable people, rich as well as poor, were strained by the constant calls upon them to send help to the army. In Chippewa, after the fact became known, a systematic effort was made by a small body of citizens to provide a fund to meet this need. The money was subscribed privately, and disbursed by members of a small committee composed of some of the principal donors. Here the maintenance of a fatherless child was provided at an orphan school, or a home found for it in a neighbour's family; there a widow was taught a trade, and her family supported until she could earn a living for herself; or an allowance was given to an old couple until their sons now on the Rappahannock could do their duty by their parents; while nourishment and medical comforts were given to the sick whose friends and relatives were unable to do more than find them a home. The committee who undertook this work was composed exclusively of men. John, who was its founder, had made this a *sine qua non*. The object he had in view was to avoid publicity and fuss, and he politely but firmly refused all co-operation from the Chippewa ladies. As the meetings of the committee were held at his farm in the presence of his mother, a woman's experience and knowledge were always at its disposal, and a nurse was employed for sick cases; but the work of the society was done by men. David Haniman, the minister, was a member; Dr. Selliger was chairman; the county attorney gave more time than he could well spare; but the

main support of the whole was John himself. He did more work and gave more money than all the rest; only his mother knew how much. It was a great help and comfort to him. During those hard years up to '64, when circumstances drew him by force from his quiet life and swept away all his resolutions; during those years he was wrestling fiercely with himself, his back against the wall. Jean was not the main cause of this, though had she never turned against him the battle would not have been so bitter. The real trial was to see the task of the Union Army growing harder month by month; to hear the cry for men—more men; yet to be obliged himself to stand on one side, a passive spectator, when he would have given his heart's blood to be in the midst of it. But he never wavered in his resolution. The need his mother felt for his presence was too obvious. She had told the simple truth, and John knew it, when she said that if he had gone to the war she would not have lived a month. This knowledge, and his own humility about himself, kept John still and outwardly quiet. He flattered himself that his mother never knew the storm that raged beneath the coolness of his manner when they discussed the movements of the troops, and marked out on maps he was always buying the position of the armies, the advance and retreat of the Union Generals McClellan, and Pope, foiled and discomfited again and again by the Southerners, Lee and Stonewall Jackson. As the months passed on, and the summer of '62 began to turn to autumn, in John's heart, as in those of all Union men, a sore and angry feeling grew that

this condition of things must end. The Union army was far better equipped than the Confederates, and had the larger numbers. The soldiers by this time were brave, hardy, and well-trained. Yet still the rebels held the field.

It was September, and in the Northern States the peace and beauty of the country contrasted sadly with the miseries and restlessness of men. A rumour had gone forth, no one knew why or whence, spreading with great swiftness to the remotest corners of the States, that a momentous change of policy was under consideration. At first it was said that Lincoln wished to declare peace; but this report was soon discredited and superseded by another, said to come from the highest sources, that though a peace-party was in the Cabinet itself, and growing stronger every day, Lincoln himself, like some great cone of granite beaten by an angry sea, stood sternly in the way.

In Chippewa the excitement and suspense was intense. Men and women who had not spoken to each other for years, stopped in the street to talk and ask for news. Thus one evening when John rode into town, as he did now every day, and met Jean and Mrs. Haniman, it gave him no shock to see Jean come forward.

"I am so glad to see you. There is news at last, and father is going to read it aloud. The store is crowding up already. Come with us to the platform."

The place was full, but John quickly made way for his companions until, as on that Saturday even-

ing long ago, he stood behind Luke Selby, side by side with Jean.

Luke was waiting for silence, and, man of easy self-possession as he was, his face was pale to-day. The store was full; but not with young men crying out for war. In their places were women and men with careworn faces, many in deepest mourning, all with hearts aching for boys whom they might never see again.

“My dear friends,” Luke began, and at his words every one fell silent, and the room was still, “I have been asked by our pastor to read out to you what the newspapers have brought this afternoon. Brother Haniman,” he turned to the white-haired minister who stood behind him, “has it in his mind that we should give public expression of our feelings on this matter. Friends, I hold here a message from the President. He has thrown the gauntlet down, and if you, the people of the North, confirm his words, there will be no peace until the South is crushed. I will read you what he says.”

He stepped forward to the edge of the platform, and read in a deep, solemn tone, so that every word was heard by all, the proclamation for the emancipation of the slaves.

“That on the first day of January, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty-three, all persons held as slaves within every State, or part of a State, the people whereof shall be in rebellion against the United States, shall be then, thenceforward, and forever, free. And the executive Government of the United States, including the mili-

tary and civil authorities thereof, will recognise and maintain the freedom of such persons, and will do no act or acts to repress such persons, or any of them, in any effort they may make for their actual freedom.—Abraham Lincoln.”

When the sonorous voice ceased, there was a deep silence. The paleness of Luke's face had fallen on his listener's as it was falling on the faces of hundreds of thousands throughout the Union who read the news this day. No one in Wisconsin failed to grasp the full significance of the proclamation. It meant that from “now, thenceforward, and forever” the North would fight not for the Union alone, but for the freedom of the slaves. Up to this time, both at home and abroad, a thousand different opinions were held concerning the amount of interest Northern men really felt in the bondage of the negro—the emancipation of whom the Southerners believed that Abraham Lincoln himself desired more than anything else. There were the Abolitionists, of course. But even when the war broke out they were not a tithe of the population. The great majority in the North had been welded together to fight the South through their devotion to the flag. Numbers approved of slavery; none, except the Abolitionists, were prepared to vote—much less to fight—for the freedom of the negro. When Lincoln's emancipation proclamation was discussed by the Cabinet, many earnest men told him it would prove a fatal blow to the Union. It meant war on the part of the South, more vindictive and stubborn than had been yet, for Southerners were certain to believe that the

proclamation was intended to provoke an insurrection of the slaves. What a terrible blow, argued the peace-party, would this be to the North, a nation tired of war! All these objections, however, Lincoln put on one side, and against opposition that was not dreamed of by the public, and will, perhaps, never be known, he sent forth his message to the people, played his great trump card, then waited with a quiet, even mind to hear the answer.

The silence in the store at Chippewa lasted a full minute; and then a man stepped forward on the platform, David Haniman, the minister, and all the people stared.

"Martha Haniman's husband" they called him, tolerating him in his ministerial capacity as one "gifted with learnin'," looking down upon him from an immeasurable height of superiority for his simplicity. He had never led the smallest of their boys except by the persuasion of his mildness and sweet nature. Many of the younger men thought he was "not all there." Now they did not know him. His bowed head was thrown back royally, his feet were firmly planted, his eyes ablaze.

"God bless the President!" he cried, his voice ringing through the hall like a trumpet note. "God bless Abraham Lincoln! My brothers and sisters, let us give thanks unto the Lord. You, who have sons in Virginia; you, whose fathers, brothers, husbands fight under Grant in Tennessee; and you, who, like myself, have been denied the privilege of sending their dearest to this sacred war—give thanks to God. There is no power on earth can defeat our sol-

diers now. Up to this time, while we have fought for the Union only, the Southerners have had a cause many have thought near as good as ours. Now, we fight for freedom, they for slavery, and this will bring their power to naught. Brothers and sisters, in this hour of trial—for the flames of war will light the sky when our true men march on—let us, I beseech you, stand by the President. I am a man of peace, but it is my duty first to preach the Christian religion. Slavery is antichristian. Those who defend this monstrous thing must be swept down with the sword until they see the evil of their ways or cumber the earth no more. Support this proclamation—ask Brother Selby to send a telegraphic message to the President, to tell him that we, citizens of Chippewa assembled, hereby accord him our most heartfelt thanks for his great words, and will uphold them and all that they may bring to the last drop of our blood.”

He paused, and sank back into his chair, collapsing, now that it was over, into the mild pastor that they knew.

But his words received a response no one else’s would have done. John seconded the resolution, and then it was carried by acclamation without one dissentient voice.

The war cry had been given to the North in its hour of sorest need. Here and there savage protests might be heard, while in the South it was received with a universal shriek of denunciation. But Lincoln was right. From city, and town, and hamlet, especially from the West, came a mighty cry of re-

lief and congratulation. War? Who now could dream of peace until the serpent—slavery—which had spread the venom of its noisome breath so many weary years, lay crushed and lifeless, ground beneath the heel of a free people who were determined, stern, united in one bond from East to West, unconquerable as fate.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE winter of 1863, the hardest winter the American people had ever known. The war still raged, and though the defeat of Lee at Gettysburg in the preceding July, and the fall of Vicksburg, which secured the free passage of the Mississippi for the Free States, had given the Confederate cause a check that many of their best men considered irreparable, they still fought on stubbornly, and the end was not yet.

The cold this year was unusually severe—an additional hardship. The winter began early and lasted long. Mrs. Selby was sinking fast. The progress of the disease had been extremely slow, thanks to the strength of her constitution and the unremitting care of her daughter and her friends. But when the frosts began in earnest she drooped quickly, and knew she would not live to see another New Year's day. Yet she was happy and at peace in spite of the pain she suffered. She no longer feared for the future of her family. Jean, after many hard struggles and failures and discouragements without end, had trained herself to be an expert housewife and a devoted nurse. She had not stood alone in her trial; but no one, except Mrs. Burletson and John, knew the constant self-denial, the infinite patience, which

had been required of her through the weary months since the summer of 1862. At times, when she was very tired, and the children very troublesome, Jean felt that the weight of it all was too great to be borne, and she would cry over the endless sewing, and rebel against the fate which had cast such responsibility upon her. But the fortitude with which her mother bore her sufferings, and Mrs. Burletson's cheery greetings the next day when she came loaded with every delicacy that 'Ria's cookery and the resources of the farm could supply, cheered and strengthened Jean anew. She had many kind friends, but it was upon Mrs. Burletson she learned to lean in these days. She dreaded to see cold and stormy weather when the old lady was unable to venture out, for her visits were the happiest time in the hard day. John, also, was a welcome guest. All coolness and constraint between them had vanished long ago, and the old friendship—with a difference—had revived in all its strength. His refusal to volunteer was still a mystery to Jean, but she was content, now, to let it be. His work among the poor of the district was well known to her, and won her warmest admiration. They did not, however, see much of one another. It was the children whom John came to see. These poor little mortals, in spite of all Jean's efforts, had a melancholy time of it, for they were old enough to understand something of the calamity that was coming upon them. John soon became the object of their warmest adoration; and all their holidays were spent at the farm, where they fed chickens—and hunted them when no one was looking—eat

apples without stint, played hide-and-seek in the great barns, and enjoyed themselves to their heart's content. They were favourites everywhere. Even Mrs. Haniman, in theory the sternest of disciplinarians, had a soft place in her heart for "Martha's family," and when Maury, the youngest, a fascinating eight-year-old, developed chicken-pox, Mrs. Haniman carried her off to her own house to be cured.

Jean's greatest support in her trials were Seth's letters. He had been one of the fortunate ones, and while comrades around him sickened and died he escaped without a scratch. In the Shenandoah Valley, at Antietam, at Gettysburg itself, he fought with his regiment, and came gaily through it all. He would complain at times half humorously of the hardships of campaigning, but always said he was well in health, and hard as a nail. He had the faculty of description, and a rapid pen, and, as far as he knew it, Jean received a comprehensive account of the progress of the war, with swift and trenchant criticisms of the Union generals. Seth spared no one. In strongest language he condemned McClellan's over-caution, Pope's errors, the incapacity of Burnside, and the vanity of Hooker. Surely never in the annals of war were the commanders of an army subject to such scathing criticism by their men as in the American struggle of the sixties. The later letters, or such portions of them as related to the war, Jean read to John and his mother, which led to John's maps finding their way to the store, and to many hours of talk about the war. Jean was always struck by the wide grasp and accurate knowledge which John possessed of military matters,

and his keen interest in them. She wondered more than ever why he had not gone to the war, and brooded over it, until one afternoon, when Mrs. Burletson was in the sick-room, and she was alone with John, some chance word of his revealed the truth.

"Tell me that again, John. You say your mother feels so lonesome when you are away—that you find it makes a difference to her health. Is that really so?"

"I fear it is," he replied, surprised at her eager tone. "I am all she has, as you may say. She kind of clings to me."

"Then I know at last why you never went to the war," Jean exclaimed. "It would have killed her to part with you, and you knew it."

Her lips trembled as she spoke, and her eyes filled with tears. John saw that he could not evade her now. He tried to laugh it off.

"Cornered, cornered! as the boys say. Don't you ever tell mother."

"Oh, John, can you—but you never can—forgive me?"

"Pshaw! There is nothing——"

"But there is everything. I have slandered you to your face, and to—to others. I have been unjust, cruel—everything that's mean. Oh, why did you not tell me at first? Why did you deny it when I asked you long ago?"

She was crying in real earnest now, tears which burnt her cheeks.

"Jean, Jean, you must not take it this way," he cried, laying his hand on hers a moment, drawing it

away the next and thrusting it in his pocket, "the past is dead. I don't feel I have anything to forgive now. If I was hurt once it was my own fault. I kept it all to myself because of mother. Had she known I stayed away from the war for her she would not have had any peace of mind again. I knew if one person were told, even you, it would be sure to get to her. I think now I was a fool. But that does not alter facts. Please let it all alone. I am glad enough to think you understand me now. Hush, here's mother."

As Mrs. Selby grew weaker Jean nursed her day and night, except at intervals for necessary rest, when Mrs. Haniman, at her own request, took her place. Jean began to realize now in the fullest degree what a responsibility the up-bringing of her brothers and sisters was going to be. Her father, it was true, was a well-to-do man; lack of means would never trouble them. But Jean had found that no help from him was to be expected in the guidance of the children. He was not unkind to them, simply indifferent. Soul, body, and mind, he was given to money-making, and to maintaining his public position among his neighbours. He was a zealous, energetic guardian of public trusts; in business he was hard, over-reaching, and industrious; in his home, a blank and a nonentity. Their mother had been all in all to the younger children. At her death Jean saw that she must take her place.

Mrs. Selby died the last day of January, lingering on a month longer than any one expected. Jean kept her self-control to the last; made every arrange-

ment, and saw to every detail of the household and its wants. But when it was over and she went into the still room and gazed upon the face that never more would answer by a look or smile to any words of hers, when that bitter blow was dealt which only comes at such a time in all its fulness, the realization of her loss came home to her, and she broke down. Mrs. Haniman was there, and though an important committee meeting claimed her attention in half an hour, she did not leave the store until late in the evening, putting the children to bed and sitting with Jean until the girl went to sleep, tired out with grief.

The day of the funeral was bleak and wintry, and a northwesterly wind sweeping in angry blasts over the bare places and whining round house corners with an ominous moan. The afternoon of the next day, John, finishing his work early, hitched up his team to drive into town for the weekly supplies.

"You will be caught in a storm, son," his mother said, handing him his gloves.

"Like enough," he replied, smiling; "but if I lose my way the ponies will not. No danger, mother."

The snow began to fall before he reached the last of his fences. By the time he reached the open road it was coming down so fast that he found it hard to see the track. He was going at a brisk pace, when one of the horses shied at a figure in the road—a woman's figure hurrying by without shawl or other protection from the storm—Jean.

In a moment John's team were on their haunches, and he had leapt to the ground.

“What has happened?”

There was a dazed look in Jean's eyes as she turned that frightened him.

“I was going to your mother,” she said, in a voice that sounded hollow and unnatural. “Don't stop for me. I know my way, and the storm cools my brain.”

“You have not told me what is the matter.”

“I have had news from Seth—horrible news. But go on to town. I don't feel like talking now. I will tell you when you get back.”

She would have passed on now, but he took her hand and held it.

“Get in. We'll be there in five minutes.”

“Oh, no. Let me walk.”

“Get in.”

The words came sternly, and Jean obeyed.

John did not speak again. All the rugs and his own heavy overcoat he wrapped closely round Jean, then turned his team and put them at the gallop. His blood was on fire, and the horses knew it and tore home at furious speed. In a slight hollow of the road Jean was jolted against him, and his heart leapt up in fierce joy. In her direst extremity she had come to him and his for comfort and for help. All the love that he had crushed down into the hidden chambers of his heart, so firmly that he scarcely knew himself at times whether it still existed, burst its bonds now and poured through his veins like new blood. How precious they were, those minutes, as she sat cowering against him—worth a lifetime of unhappiness. Then came the lights of the farm, and

he had to help her down and leave her with his mother. Presently he would see her again, and hear what had happened to Seth—poor lad! Now, for some hard work. He took the horses to the stable and rubbed them down until they shone like burnished copper; then he went to the wood-pile behind the house, and picking out the toughest log there, hewed and split it into firewood; then he looked at his watch. He had kept away for a whole hour; that was enough.

Mrs. Burletson was sitting before the fire talking. Jean on a stool at her feet listening with woe-begone face, colourless, hopeless. John thought she looked the picture of despair.

“Sonny,” his mother cried as he came slowly toward them, inclined to feel himself in the way, “we are needing you. I have a matter to discuss in which we want your mind.”

She spoke with energy and some excitement, at which John wondered vaguely. He came to the fire as he was told, and stood leaning on the mantelpiece, looking down into Jean’s face.

“I want your counsel, John. I told Jean, and she knows it to be true, that no one is so well acquainted with the movement of the armies and with the lay of the country in the South as you. Seth has been taken prisoner. That is the news Jean brings. Luckily enough he was able to send word by a note, passed through by an officer who was exchanged. The boy is not wounded, and as far as we can learn is well in health; but Jean is distracted night to desperation by what the papers tell of men in Southern pris-

ons. I say that the papers lie; but my words do not convince her—poor child.”

“You are good to try and comfort me,” Jean broke in drearily. “I know what is true and what is not; but I interrupted you.”

“Well, Seth,” Mrs. Burletson continued, “is in prison, a place called Santanelle, in Georgia. Now, as soon as I heard this, I said to Jean ‘Hope,’ and I say so again. You shall tell me, John, whether my ideas are moonshine. Did you not say once that there was talk of an army under General Sherman going right through Georgia?”

“That is so, and I heard more to-day. The advance is to be made in the spring. They are beginning preparations now.”

Mrs. Burletson patted Jean’s hand.

“Did I not tell you he would know? Here is my plan, then. If Seth is in prison in Georgia, and Sherman marches through that State, is it not possible that Seth might be rescued?”

John looked doubtful.

“Georgia is a tremendous big country, mother, and Sherman’s business will be to get through the best way he can. There will be no time for him to welter round picking up prisoners unless they are directly in the line of march, and Santanelle is in northern Georgia. But go on—let me hear all.”

“It was my idea that if in Sherman’s army there were folk, or say one man, interested in Seth, it might be that a party could go forth and bring Seth out. Of course, it goes without saying, that it all depends on the man.” Mrs. Burletson sat very erect, and

looked at John with searching eyes. "But I have known men who could do it. You may ask me to find them. I will answer that question later. First you must tell me whether, given such men, the notion has sense in it. I want to know your idea, son."

But John had turned away.

"Your words, mother," he said at last, "have point in them. There will be difficulties at every turn—more than we can see—but there might be a chance, aye, more than a chance, of success. And it is the only way. So much is certain. Exchange of prisoners now, they say, is not to be done. What does Jean say?"

"It seems impossible to me," she answered, in the same hopeless tone she had used before. "If it could be done, and I don't see that, where is the man to be found who would try? Oh, why do we talk about what can never be? Excuse me, I am abrupt and rude. If only I were a man, or free to go as I am. But I am held in, having the children to think of, and my helplessness maddens me. I think I will go home."

She rose and kissed Mrs. Burletson, but the old lady detained her with one hand, and, rising too, laid the other on John's shoulder.

"John," she said, "it is time for you to speak. I know by your face that what has been working in my mind is now in yours. She must not go in ignorance. Speak, and tell Jean where to find this man."

A pause—while Jean, startled, bewildered, looked John in the face with questioning eyes. Then he spoke at last.

"Mother has told you my thoughts as well as her own. This thing shall be done if I can do it."

"You!"

"Yes, Jean, me." His voice was low and strained, but full of determination. "I would not offer if there were any other way, or another man. I did not go to the war because I would not leave my mother—she may know that now."

"I guessed it, son, from the first," Mrs. Burletson cried, "and have known it long."

"I did not go," he repeated, "because it would have killed her to live alone. Now it is different, she will have you. Besides, I don't volunteer to stay out the war, but go to find Seth and then come back. Mind, I don't know that I can do much or anything. But all that is in me you may count upon. And if you will take my services, I will seek the boy and bring him home, please God, sound as he went away."

And Jean. She tried to speak, then dumbly held out a hand to each, and breaking down utterly, fell upon Mrs. Burletson's neck, and burst into a passion of tears.

CHAPTER XIV.

JOHN and his mother went late to rest that night; but Jean was taken home early, as she had her family to put to bed. It was a very short drive to John. His nerves were still thrilled with excitement, though it was purified by a determination to procure Seth's freedom at any cost; but it was there, and he felt keen enjoyment in her mere presence. He did not want to talk, it was enough to feel that they were together. In the evening, after consideration of practical ways and means, he began to be smitten with remorseful pangs about his mother. He left his table, drew a stool to her feet, and leant his head against her knee.

"Mother, I did not know I could be so selfish."

"Why selfish, son?"

"Because I am content to leave you."

"Thank God," she said, devoutly.

John looked up.

"Why do you say that? I ought not to be. We have been all in all to one another."

She stroked his forehead.

"I am your mother, dear, no more. You gave me three years of your manhood's prime. God forgive me for taking it; but you did this because of

your love for me. That three years is over. I am as happy to-night as you are—happier than I have ever been since Luke read out the Proclamation. Something you said after that gave me full knowledge of why you had stood aside from the war. You should not have done it for me, John, you should not!”

For answer he took her hand and kissed it, and they were silent for a long time.

Mrs. Burletson broke the pause.

“Anyway, whatever betides down South, whether you are doing your duty under General Sherman, John, or seeking Seth, you will know now that I can never be miserable or lonesome. Jean will be with me a great deal, and I have the joy of feeling that you are on the path I set before you with my own hand. I cannot want more. All I shall worry about will be if the men you leave in charge of the farm and the stock don’t do their duty; but I know you will arrange those things.”

“That does not trouble me in the least,” he answered. “Jim Hallett will be your manager. With your head and his, and one more labourer, the farm will go right well.”

“Then tell me now about your plans. I was thinking of them while you drove Jean home, and the more I thought the more difficult it all seemed.”

“It is difficult. The army for Georgia is to be composed of picked men. A raw recruit will not be wanted here. Besides, as a private in the ranks I would be tied to my regiment—to my company—and could not move except where my bit of the army

happened to march. We will have to think out an idea, quite a different idea from volunteering."

"That is so. I see by your face, though, that you have already thought of a way. Let me hear it."

John laughed tenderly.

"What, do you not see? Yes, I have a sort of notion. The contract is such a big one when you come to work it out, that I must fly high to start with. I intend going to Washington with all the introductions I can get, my hope being that among them I may find one that will take me to the White House."

"The President, John?"

"Abraham Lincoln himself."

"I like that idea. But what could he do?"

"Almost all I need, if he should feel like it. I was reading the other day in that reb paper I get sometimes, *The Richmond Examiner*, a rather smart argument for the right of secession, which they took, they said, from certain clauses in the Constitution of the United States. I went straight to Attorney Thorpe's office and read the constitution, end to end. Among other things, which I never knew before, I found that the President is commander-in-chief of the army. It strikes me, therefore, that it is worth while to try for a word from him to General Sherman. Whether I will ever get to him, and what he'll say if I do, remains to be seen; but I mean to try. If this fails, why I will go to Georgia and interview the General on my own account."

John made his preparations very quietly, and by his request no one was told of his plans until the last

moment, in consequence of which he escaped innumerable questions and much good advice. He saw Jean alone once before he went away. He had made up his mind not to do so, but his resolution failed him at the last, and he called in for a few minutes on his way to the railway depot. His visit was quite unexpected. Luke was in the store, and Jean was giving Sam, the eldest of the boys, a reading lesson. Sam, however, discreet beyond his years, not only retired with his book at John's entrance, but mounted guard in the hall to prevent interruption.

It was not a sentimental interview at all. Jean's greeting was a merry laugh, for it happened that Attorney Thorpe, a well-meaning but fussy and particular person, had begged her that morning to hint to John the paramount importance of good clothes in Washington, and that the blue jean he affected in Chippewa must not be thought of—and here was John dressed in this same blue jean. John was given the attorney's message at once, and laughed too.

"Tell my dear old friend," he said, "that I have seriously thought the question out, and I reckon the best thing a man can do when he goes into the world is to look what he really is as near as he can. I am a Wisconsin farmer, and I wear the clothes I am used to, and that are used to me. If I were to put on the uniform of a brigadier-general I could not be more than a farmer, and certainly less of a man. But, Jean, I just came in to say good-bye, and ask whether you had any further message for Seth; I have the packet safe that you gave mother for him."

"It contains all, thank you; but I have much

to say to you, John, if I could only put it into words."

"Don't try," John cried, with a grimace; "that would be too bad, for I cannot talk, and I hate that folk should do what is not in me. Good-bye; I will do my best; and be sure that he and you are worth it all."

Their hands met with a long, close pressure, and they looked into one another's eyes. Then he was gone. In the passage he ran against Sam, and caught the boy in his arms.

"Sam, lad, can you make a promise and keep it?"

"'Course I can, for you."

"Then swear to this; be a man, though you are only twelve years old; never give Jean one hour of trouble till I come home again, and if any one else does, go for him straight."

"What a thing to ask!" was the shrill answer; and Sam struggled back to his feet swelling with manly scorn. "Ain't she *Jean*? 'Sides, Mr. John, I am thirteen come two weeks to-day, not twelve at all."

Nevertheless, Sam went back to the parlour a graver boy than he had left it, and when he saw that Jean looked tired and heavy-eyed, declared he had a headache and would go to bed right now.

John reached Washington early in March. It was still bitterly cold, but the snow had melted in the principal thoroughfares, and the queer straggling city of "hovels and palaces" was drearier and muddier than usual. Washington in those days was a city of large public buildings, immensely wide, badly-paved streets, lined with wooden shanties, stone man-

sions, and shops of brick and stucco—the queerest medley of contrasts of any city in the States. It was full of people, and for the whole of his first day there, John amused himself by exploring it, and entering into conversation with all sorts and conditions of men. There was method in his inquiries, however, for they all ended with queries concerning the personal idiosyncrasies of the President. He heard a great deal of nonsense and many palpable lies, but picked up certain important facts; that which struck him the most being the information that any man who had business with Abraham Lincoln might go to the White House at a certain hour of the day and see him. He would do this, he thought, if all else failed. The next day he presented his introductions, and his tribulations began. The great men were “busy,” and days passed before he could get an audience with them. When he did so at last, by sheer perseverance, he was told that the discovery of America by Columbus was easy compared to what he had set himself to do.

“Go home, my good friend,” said one, the greatest man of all, who did what the rest only pretended to do—listened to what John had to say. “Go right back, and tell the poor lad’s folk that there is nothing to be done until the Confederacy breaks up. Do you suppose the President can see to such a little thing? You can interview him, certainly—eleven in the morning is the best time, I am told. But I put it to you—among the prisoners held by the rebels is one private soldier of any real account, except to those who know him? The President

will shake hands, hear your tale, tell you, maybe, a little story to show you how hopeless it is, and that will be all. I am very sorry. Glad to have seen you. Now, *good-bye*."

What was to be done next? John, a pessimist by temperament, felt that these remarks contained the soundest of common sense. But—and here he would drop his head between his shoulders as obstinate men have a trick of doing—a way had to be found. He must try the President; and eleven o'clock the next morning found him at the White House. It also found a few hundred others there. John went with the rest into a long corridor and waited. When the President came in, John modestly shrank into a corner and watched his face from a distance, as he spoke to this person and that, a word or two to each. He did not come near John, whose bashfulness was too great to permit him to push forward; besides, of what use would a word in a crowd be to him? But though John went away no wiser than he came, he was glad he had been to the White House. As he walked back to his hotel he could see the President still, towering from his great height above all common men, with long, cadaverous face and deepset sunken eyes. Weary, melancholy eyes—the eyes of a man who was never free from care; upon whose shoulders lay the burden of a nation in its agony; who felt its griefs and miseries and dangers, as if they were his own. A man who never left himself in peace even during his rare intervals of rest, but was for ever, night and day, planning, thinking, deciding for others; holding in his strong hands the

welfare of millions and knowing it; yet never losing nerve or heart. Learning from those about him all they had to teach, listening to everything they had to say; and then drawing into himself, and, after silent commune with his own judgment and conscience, controlling and dictating all that was done. Such was Abraham Lincoln.

All afternoon John wandered aimlessly about the streets trying to find a way where there was no way, losing heart and hope every hour. He made inquiry at the railway offices, and found that the wealth of a millionaire would not enable him to approach the army in Georgia without a permit from the war office. He went there, saw a minor official, and was told with unnecessary abruptness that his application was absurd, and that he might as well try and reach the moon as General Sherman. At length, tired out, he returned to his hotel and ate a frugal supper. When he had finished, a restlessness greater than his weariness sent him forth again into the city. He wandered now, half mechanically, in the direction of the White House. As he was passing the gates, the sight of a man on the other side of the road brought him to a sudden stop. It was the President, strolling down the street with long, low strides, his head bent, his hands behind his back. John's heart leapt into his mouth, and before he had made up his mind what he was going to say, he crossed the road and confronted Abraham Lincoln. Then his breath forsook him, and all he had presence of mind to do was to raise his hat. The President raised his.

"Do you want something of me, friend?"

How many scores of men every day of Lincoln's life "wanted something" of him! Yet his tone was so kindly, so scrupulously polite, that John's diffidence broke down.

"I had a question to ask, Mr. President," he said, gaining courage every moment. "You will be too busy, likely, to listen now. I should be very thankful if you would tell me when it would be convenient for me to see you—alone."

"You have your chance this minute—take it. I am walking to the war office—ask me your question on the way."

They turned and walked together, John taking two steps to Lincoln's one.

"It concerns a friend of mine in Santanelle prison, northern Georgia, sir." John was cool now, and clipped his words to the briefest point; time was all-important. The President muttered something to himself, and shuddered slightly.

"Go on," he said, as John paused. "Those boys in prison are our worst troubles. But let me hear it all."

"I intend to get him out," John continued. "I have a little money, but prisoners, as I understand, cannot be exchanged."

"So. Well——"

"The only idea I have left is to go to Georgia with General Sherman, and when the army reaches the point nearest to Santanelle, get leave to try and save my friend. I know enough, sir," John added hurriedly, fearing that he would be stopped by a direct negative, "to tell that the general would not

take me on such terms as a volunteer. Would he—could it be at all—that I might join the army in any other way than a soldier? I wish to ask you this. I have money to pay my expenses. All I need is to get to the prison some way. I have promised to find this man, and I must do it. Could you help me?”

The murder was out, and John waited for an answer, white and grim. He felt no hope of success. A few words of decisive discouragement would be given and it would be over. For a few minutes the President answered nothing, walking slowly on down Pennsylvania Avenue, past the war office, in a deep reverie. Presently he looked down at his companion sideways.

“You call this man your friend. Is he no more than that?”

“No, sir. But he is engaged to be married to the oldest friend I have. I have promised to bring him back to her.”

“Ah!”

Another pause, then Lincoln said—

“Have you quite thought this thing out, friend? Sherman has no use for any man who will not fight. You will be obliged anyhow to take chances with death all the way along. Supposing you got the man outside and died yourself? It strikes me you are a little away in the clouds at present.”

John looked surprised. It was the first time any one had accused him of building castles in the air.

“I do not think so,” he said bluntly. “I know most things are against me, but, you see, there is no one else. As for fighting, I will take that as it comes,

and Sherman may make what use of me he likes—if he will let me go along with him. I am bound to go some way.”

The President, who was watching him keenly, nodded without speaking, and turning abruptly, walked back at a brisk pace to the war office. Under the lights at the door, as the sentry duly saluted, he took a card from his pocket, and writing on it in pencil, gave it to John.

“Bring this with you at three to-morrow. I can give you half an hour. We will talk about this thing, and—sec. No”—as John tried to thank him—“you have no occasion. Men with just such ideas as yours do not often come my way. Besides, friend,” with one of his rare smiles, “if it were a sacrifice to me to grant this interview, where you lay down your life, I may give a little time, I guess, and be a better man for doing so. Good night.”

He strode up the steps, the doors closed behind him, leaving John on the pavement alone, the precious card in his hand. He stood a moment looking at it, then slowly collecting his wits, turned back, and went to bed to dream of the coming interview all night long.

CHAPTER XV.

WHEN John presented the President's card at the White House, he was shown into a room where Lincoln was dictating letters to his secretary. The President extended his hand over the table and pointed to a chair, but did not pause in what he was saying, until the letter was finished. Then the secretary departed, and Lincoln poked the fire.

"The worst enemy of long men like me," he said, "is bad circulation when we grow old. I can't keep warm these days. You don't look as if you suffered, that way, or any other—tough, aren't you?"

"I was only sick once, and that was measles."

"Can you ride?"

The suddenness of this question amused John.

"Hard telling, sir. I break my own colts, and around where I live they think me a rider. I did, too, until I tried one of the Western bucking horses."

"How long did you remain?" said the President gravely.

"Five minutes."

"Then you *can* ride. Did you never volunteer?"

John looked confused, and Lincoln raised his hand.

"Do not answer if the question hurts. I would

never ask a man to say a word if he don't feel like it."

But as it happened John did feel like it. There are some men, though not many, who attract the confidence of the most reserved and reticent. Lincoln was pre-eminently such a man. His simplicity and directness, the kindly consideration of his manner, and a subtle magnetic sympathy about him charmed and conquered John. Before he knew it, he was telling the President of the United States how he had longed to go to the war, and why he had stayed at home. Then, led on by shrewd and searching questions, he went further still, until Lincoln knew, as we know it, the story of his life. All at once he remembered the time, and found to his horror that the precious half-hour he had been allowed was almost gone.

Lincoln caught the expression of his visitor's face as he looked at the clock. His eyes twinkled, though his mouth was grave.

"Don't be scared; we have five minutes yet. I said last night that men of your ideas do not often come to this house. I could say more now that I know you. I should like to see your mother; I have an idea she would remind me of my own—God bless her! You see, I was born in the country, and bred among farm-folk as you have been, and your speech and dress, John, bring back old times. I would like to help you, though I see no way yet. Did you ever hear the story of the farming man who came from Illinois? He wanted fifty dollars to buy a horse, but he had no money, and no one would lend him any;

and all the property he possessed was twenty-five hogs. Folks said this would beat him, but they were wrong, for he started right away to drive the hogs to Chicago to sell. Ever driven hogs? I have. Well—it took that farmer about six days to get twenty miles, and his hogs ran away thirty-five times; he went without sleep all the while, and had very little to eat. But he got to Chicago, and offered them to a packer.

“‘How much?’ says the packer.

“‘Fifty dollars.’

“‘Then you won’t get it.’

“‘I will,’ said the farmer.

“The packer laughed.

“‘The best in the market only fetch \$1.75. Yours are scrubs.’

“‘All right, then,’ said the farmer, ‘I must try another way.’

“The packer looked at the man.

“‘What are you going to do?’

“‘Hire a shed, kill, dress, and pack ’em myself.’

“‘But how will you live the while?’ for he knew the farmer could not have a cent.

“‘On them. Whatever comes, I will take away from here that fifty dollars—’cos *I said I would.*’ Those men are partners now, and rich, I am told.”

He looked at his watch.

“Half-past three. You must quit, friend. Call again to-morrow fifteen minutes earlier, and we’ll talk business.”

John found the President alone next day, with a large map spread upon the table.

“Come around here,” was Lincoln’s greeting.

"You will have sharper eyes than mine. I want to make out Santanelle. Have you ever seen a map of Georgia?"

"I have two at home, but neither is of any account. Santanelle is north-west, sir."

The President looked up over his spectacles.

"Fond of maps, are you? Do you draw yourself?"

"I try to. My mother and I reckoned to keep track of armies, and, as the atlas I had was small, I drew the maps myself on a larger scale around the seat of war in Virginia and Tennessee. They are but bad ones, and only serve to give a rough idea."

Lincoln left the table, adjusted his spectacles, and put his hands beneath his coat tails.

"I have made inquiries. I find it may not be necessary for you to go South at all—we may get an exchange."

He spoke slowly, watching John's face. That face expressed nothing but blank astonishment.

"What do you think of it?" Lincoln went on, dryly.

"Why that his folk—I mean Jean"—the President knew who Jean was—"would be ready to give her life to you in gratitude."

"And you—what about yourself, John Burleson?"

John hung his head, and Lincoln saw his teeth clench.

"If you want the truth, and I could not frame aught else to you, I feel as if you'd robbed me. This is my only chance to go; but there—excuse my rude-

ness—I could not, probably, have saved the boy at all. I am nothing in it—anyhow. I thank you for my mother's sake."

"Will you not go if I find the means?"

John raised his head quickly.

"I have longed for that all these years. Since the day I knew the slaves were to be free, it has been almost more than I could bear to stay at home."

The President's face lighted up, and his sad eyes glowed with enthusiasm.

"Then you approved of the Proclamation," he said, slowly. "Tell me!"

"The whole West approved. You gave us heart and hope when they were needed most. We have been a different people since. Many a man who'd not fight for the Union has given his life to free the slaves. The war is sacred now."

Lincoln stepped forward, and the men clasped hands.

"Friend," he said, in a tone as tender as though he were addressing a younger brother, "you must go to the front. I have only been trying you. Exchanges cannot be made now. If that boy is to be brought out—if those hogs are to be sold—you must put your shoulder to the thing and do it yourself. The most I can do is to clear the way; that I will gladly do."

He laid his arm on John's shoulder caressingly.

"You are a fraud, John. One of those men who go through life telling lies—about themselves. We will have you in the army, and, please God, keep you there till we send you home with a star upon your

collar. I shall write to your mother, so that you will not get a chance of backing down. I wish her to know that we feel we owe her something for sending her son."

"She will be the proudest woman in the United States," John exclaimed.

"She has need to be middling proud of you. When do you start?"

"I will go to-night if there is a train South."

"One of the men whose wheels are always greased, eh? Well, you shall have a note to General Sherman in an hour. If you get this man out, I should like to know it."

He shook John's hand warmly, and led him to the door to cut short his thanks. When he had gone, Lincoln wheeled a chair in front of the fire, and put his feet upon the mantelpiece. It was an old habit he still indulged in when alone. He used to say he could think better so.

"Uncle Billy Sherman will not like this," he said to himself; "but I will have my way, and he must find a place for the boy. It is such men who keep the Union together and will win the war."

John left Washington at seven o'clock that evening. The President was better than his word. Besides an autograph letter to General Sherman was a pass over the railroads to Chattanooga, Sherman's headquarters, which provided John with a free journey and excellent treatment from the officials all along the line. It was well he had this pass, or he would have had the greatest difficulty in reaching his destination. The further he went, the greater be-

came the crush of trains, bearing freight for the army. Nothing but such freight was allowed at this time. All private baggage and stores were ruthlessly switched into sidings, to be removed at the owner's pleasure or to rot, as the case might be. John, as a private individual, might have waited like these cars, but the pass, which elevated him to the rank of a special messenger, overcame all difficulties, and, after some unavoidable delays, an engine was detached for his benefit, and he was whirled on to Chattanooga.

The army here, and nothing but the army. Trim, sunburnt men were on the platform in uniform, soldiers were unloading cars, a squad was drilling on a plot of waste land by the wayside, while further away were rows upon rows of tents. Everywhere was the hum and bustle of preparation, the men working for their lives. The stirring sight made John's heart beat quickly, and when the strains of a band and the rattle of drums sounded from the other side of the camp, he could have shouted aloud in his excitement. The train stopped, and he was confronted by an orderly who was somewhat taken aback at the sight of this plain farming-man in a private car.

"Secret-service, dead-head?" he said to himself with disgust. "He'll find Uncle Billy don't take much stock in him."

"You can see the general now, if you want," he said to John, after narrowly examining the letter and pass. "Come around with me."

John was surprised. His notion of a general's quarters were taken from the newspaper accounts of the splendour of General McClellan, the least of which

depicted a man in imposing gold-laced uniform, surrounded by a brilliant staff, and attended by a guard of soldiers always under arms. Such a man, he imagined, could not be approached except at certain times and seasons, and then only by special permission. The readiness of the orderly to take him straight to Sherman, he put down in his simplicity to the President's note. As they approached a tent which stood apart, with a flag flying over it, John looked in vain for the brilliant staff and imposing uniforms. Near the tent, which in itself was rather shabbier than those about it, sat a dozen men in camp-chairs smoking pipes. Could these be Sherman's staff? And could the man in the centre, dressed in a jacket of faded blue serge, and battered black felt hat, sucking at a pipe which would not draw with as much vigour and concentrated energy as though he were charging the enemy—could this be the general himself? There was no doubt of it, for the orderly stepped up smartly, as a soldier does under the eye of his commander, and saluting, presented the letter John had given him. While the general read it John looked at him with keen interest, and noted the square head and prominent chin, the lips set tightly together, the eyes extraordinarily keen and alert, and felt that he was in the presence of one of the greatest men in the army. The general read the letter hastily, and cast a sharp glance at John; then read it again—slowly, and beckoned. John stepped forward. He wanted to salute, but could not for the life of him remember which hand to raise, so lifted his hat instead.

"What is your name?"

"John Burletson, General."

"Where are you from?"

"Chippewa—Wisconsin."

"Seen any fighting?"

"Not yet."

"Do you want to?"

"I do so." The reply was so emphatic that the staff chuckled.

"When will you begin?"

"At your orders, sir."

"What baggage have you?"

"This. John displayed one small grip-sack. The officers laughed again.

"H'm," said the general, "the President says you have ideas. I begin to think he has grounds for the notion. But ideas, mind, are of no kind of use to a soldier until he gets experience. Do you know why we were whipped at Bull Run?"

"Our want of discipline for one thing?"

"You have struck it."

"But after all," John added eagerly, "if we had held the enemy's position we would have done as well as they—or better."

"Why so?"

"With raw troops it is so much easier to defend than attack, at least," pulling up as he remembered to whom he was speaking, "so I have understood."

Sherman himself laughed this time.

"He talks like General Scott. The only thing that puzzles me is why he was not at Bull Run himself. However, if the war-fever has come late, it

seems to have stuck its claws deep. See, then, my man. Report yourself to the sergeant of couriers. Orderly, take him to your mess. To-morrow we will see what lies behind all this."

John withdrew and rejoined the orderly, who, from a respectful distance, had been a keenly interested listener to the foregoing conversation. This orderly was a smart, well-built fellow of about John's own age. He wore long boots and spurs, and walked with the swing of a cavalry man.

He looked at John with a friendly grin.

"First time you've met Uncle Billy, I presume?"

"I guess it is."

"But you've heard of him—I'll swear."

"Most folks have—why?"

"You played your cards so well."

John looked up.

"I made a mess of it you mean. Guess that is so. Better luck next time."

"No; that was not my meaning. You had a steepish pitch to climb, for if there's one thing that riles Uncle Billy Sherman, it is a recommendation from Washington. But you climbed, and he is a man who, when he takes hold, will freeze uncommon hard. Now for supper, mate."

They were in the midst of the camp, and from every side came the glare of fires, the clatter of pots and pans, a smell savoury to hungry men. Soldiers were cooking their evening meal; mostly in frying-pans of every remarkable size and shape, battered and dented and old. The faces of the men John noticed were battered too, but brown and healthy. There

was little talking among them, and none of the loud laughter and shouting that went on in the camp of recruits at Washington. Sherman's men seemed to be too hungry to laugh, and those who had eaten, smoked quietly and chattered in low tones. Nor could John discover any of the elaborate cooking ranges which had been a feature near the officers quarters in the regiment he had seen up North. Everything was as plain and simple in construction, and nearly as easy to carry away as General Sherman's old camp-chair.

The orderly halted before one of the oldest and most rickety cooking-stoves John had ever seen. Here an immense man with arms bare to the shoulders, dressed in a striped flannel shirt and regimental trousers, was on his hands and knees blowing at the embers of a dying fire to ignite a handful of kindling.

"This is our sergeant," the orderly remarked to John. "When he is through blowing, if he don't bust, I will introduce you."

The man at the fire, though he heard the words, paid no attention to the speaker, but puffed steadily at the stove until a blaze rewarded the efforts, and his face was well in hand. Then he rose slowly to his feet, and surveying them with arms akimbo, addressed the orderly in a voice like the boom of heavy artillery.

"You blasted coon of a deserter, Mike, where've you been? Mighty little grub you shall stow away to-night. I left this fire to you."

"Deserter indeed!" was the retort. "Go to—Uncle Billy. Man alive, why don't you salute? Don't you recognise the President's brother-in-law? He's

come to serve in the rank, and Uncle Billy's sent him to you. Friend," addressing John, "Cartwright Hornber stands before you. The thirstiest man the Almighty ever made; sergeant of couriers; majordomo of our mess; a demon for his vittles; a baa-lamb to the foe; we call him Joshua. Sergeant, this is John Burletson, Esquire, from the White House, Washington."

Hornber grunted.

"Dry up, you. John Burletson, I am pleased to make your acquaintance." He had been looking hard at John while the orderly was speaking, and now extended his hand. "I don't know who you really are. No one takes any notice of Mike, but I like your face, and could wish you were in better company. Set down. Mike, you skunk, help me to get supper, we are late to-night."

This last injunction was quite unnecessary, for the orderly's coat was off before it came, and he had set to work with a skill and activity John could not sufficiently admire. He presently discovered that this Mike was a sergeant and Hornber's bosom friend. The spectacle of these men working while he sat still soon became too much for John, and, at his own request, he began drawing water and cutting up wood for future use. One by one other men dropped in hot and dusty from continuous riding, and by the time the meal was ready there were a score of them, some squatting on blankets, some on billets of wood, others on their own hats. John looked at them with great curiosity. They were couriers to Sherman's staff; a courier's duties being those of orderly and

messenger, as occasion might require. They were the best riders in the army; men of proved courage, nerve, and intelligence; as much accustomed to being under fire as they rode from division to division, from front to rear, conveying orders in writing, or by word of mouth, to the officers in command, as mill hands to the clash of machinery. As they ate, they talked of the war; when the march toward Georgia was to begin; of the gigantic scale of Sherman's preparations; of the distrust expressed of the young leader by some of the papers in the North, disputing among themselves as to whether it had any foundation in fact; finally expressing in the strongest language—John thought a little for his benefit—their contempt for everybody and everything connected with the Government, the press, and the war office. John listened to it all in modest silence. No one spoke to him, and he looked upon himself as a nonentity, allowed to partake of the mess in sufferance, through Sherman's orders. He would have been much amazed had he overheard the conversation between Hornber and Mike as they turned in.

"Cart, old friend, give us your ideas. How will he shape?"

"Finely. I'll bet you five dollars on it. Come!"

"Oh, it's my idea too. But why do you think so? He's fresh as green corn. Our work will be kind of refined hell to him."

"It will be so. But he'll go through. A man so straight in the eyes, firm-set round the jaw, and quiet in the tongue, is bound to have it in him. And, mark me, he's got brains, devilish good brains, which not

one in ten of us cusses really have, though we all think so. Anyway, I'll lay my money if you'll take it up. Poor devil, I am sorry for him though in one way. If Uncle Billy has took hold as you say, the boy will have his flesh peeled clean away with work. While as for danger, we all know that those Uncle Billy loves, as the song says, die young."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE bugle sounded at the first break of dawn, and John felt on every side the stir of rousing men. He lay still for a minute watching them. None wasted time in yawning or stretching themselves; there was not a grumble or growl; one and all they slipped from their blankets, drew on boots and uniforms, and started for work in silence. John soon followed and helped to get breakfast, devouring with the rest hard bread and the toughest of beef, washed down with muddy coffee.

“Our camp fare,” the sergeant said, watching John’s struggle with the beef, “has no fixin’s. We don’t run to more on active service, and sometimes not as much.”

John smiled, and did his best to appear to enjoy his breakfast and eat as fast as the rest, but noticed with some annoyance that he was longer over the meal than any one else. Such appetite as he possessed was taken away by Mike Salter’s announcement that the general would shortly be ready to see him.

John felt that his fate was to be decided this morning, and was not at all sure what turn affairs would take. He saw clearly that Lincoln’s letter alone would not secure him the position he desired.

Sherman, not Lincoln, was in command of the army here. Further, it was John's firm conviction that he had cut a sorry figure last night by answering literally the general's question about Bull Run. His words, innocently meant, would be looked upon as bare-faced impudence from a civilian. So John was not happy in his mind, and craved for active occupation. He was alone for the time being, and noticing that the pans and dishes were strewn about in confusion, proceeded to gather them together and put everything in order, even to placing under the stove kindling for the next fire. He then settled himself down with his back against the tent, and drawing from his bag a map of Georgia, was soon engrossed with speculations concerning the probable route of the army. Last night the couriers had canvassed this vigorously among themselves, and John had stored away in his memory the names of the places which had been mentioned in the discussion. Now, spreading out the map on the ground before him, he took from his pocket a dozen pins with heads of gray and blue sealing wax, and began picking out the present positions of the armies as far as he knew them. He was sublimely unconscious that General Sherman had strolled up unheard from behind and was watching him.

"Dalton? Where is Dalton?" John muttered. "That is where the rebs are under Jo. Johnston. There"—sticking in a big gray-headed pin. "Now, the boys said we are to go for that position and drive them out, or, better still, out-flank and crush them. How will Uncle Billy do it?" He drew from an-

other pocket a pair of compasses, and began measuring. "Twenty miles from Chattanooga." In went a blue pin. "But that is bee line. The roads will be bad, they say, and are never straight. Two days' march. And we have those armies to move. General Thomas, with the Army of the Cumberland, will start first, as he is at Cleveland. Where's Cleveland? There." In went another blue pin. "Down the Tennessee River he'll go to Red Clay"—there a third pin marked the place. "Yes, yes"—studying the effect—"simple to look at but—the country is difficult; forest and mountains and swamps. Enemy's country, too, and Johnston, the old Reb, is a smart man—some say smarter than Lee. Uncle Billy will have his hands full. Now"—he took up a gray pin—"if Dalton is not held by the rebs, where will Johnston go? Resaca, it was remarked, Resaca?—there. That will mean retreat. Now supposing he turned upon our rear. What a mine of supplies he would find! He could not do it, I guess. Yet it is worth while to think how he might try." He took up another gray pin and was about to plant it in the map when Sherman moved involuntarily and John discovered him. He sprang up horror-struck.

"Hand me that thing."

The general spoke very quietly and pointed to the map.

John picked it up, feeling like a schoolboy caught drawing caricatures in his exercise book.

"This is how you spend your time?"

"I was waiting for your orders, General."

"How long have you had this map?"

"A month."

"Any others in your bag? Show them to me."

John's spirits fell to zero. It struck him that the general would imagine him to be the correspondent of some newspaper—a person peculiarly detested, he knew, by officers in the field. Yet he felt utterly unable to explain or defend himself, and obeyed the order in silence, taking out maps of Missouri, Tennessee, and Virginia. This last was pricked with innumerable pin holes where John had followed the course of the Army of the Potomac. Not a battle fought during the war but was located in these maps and showed the traces of pin points. Sherman examined them one by one, and folded them up.

"I will keep them a while," he said. "This kind of property should not be lying around loose. It will be safer with me."

He paused, and John saluted, not knowing what else to do.

"What have you been doing since I saw you—anything?"

"No, General." John would have given worlds to have had a different answer.

"Nothing but eat and sleep?"

"No, General."

"That's a lie!" exclaimed a voice—Sergeant Hornber's.

"How is that?" said Sherman, turning sharply.

The sergeant, who had just come up, saluted and pointed to the pile of clean dishes and pans.

"Las' night, General, when you sent him here he ramped round working like two men to help get sup-

per in, and the chores done. This morning I slipped out and left every bit of this outfit in a dirty mess and muddle. I did it on purpose to see how he'd act. Look at it now! He will work, whatever there is to him besides."

General Sherman looked from one man to the other.

"Don't you call that work, Burletson?"

"Not exactly, General."

"Nor do I. Can he fight, Hornber?"

"Try him, General."

"If I do, it will be on your word."

"I will give it, every time."

"Very well, put the thing through then. It is not my idea of business, Burletson, taking a raw recruit, whose only recommendation is a letter from the President. I was in two minds this morning to send you back to Washington by the first empty freight. As for your prison scheme, I never heard such nonsense in my life. We shall not get within fifty miles of Santanelle. But I will take you as a courier, at your own risk, and chance it. You will have trouble to keep going. If you drop out, back you go to Wisconsin, if you can get there. Hornber, tell Lieutenant Snelling that by my orders this man is attached to his command, and is to be supplied with necessary kit and horse. Mind, he is under your eye. I expect that, before we start South, you will have licked him into efficiency. We want no half-baked bread on this campaign."

He turned on his heel with a nod, and Hornber struck John a huge slap on the back.

“By thunder, Burletson, you owe me two cock-tails for this morning’s work when we get to any liquor. You have slipped into what many a two-years’ man would give his soul for. Mark you, Uncle Billy has picked his army for this Georgia fandango, and the couriers, *our* couriers, are the pick of that. If you stand the racket you will be in the best of running; but if you fail with his eye upon you, blue blazes is not in it with the storm that will break on you.”

John did not see his maps again, but he did not miss them much. Work for twelve, fourteen, and sometimes eighteen hours out of the twenty-four was the order of the day. Lieutenant Snelling, in command of the couriers, the smartest subaltern in the army, looked with little favour on the new recruit.

“Sherman has played it rather low on me,” he said to Hornber. “An awkward, heavy, farm help—why, he’ll put a sore back on every horse he rides—if he can ride—and run clean away to the rear when he gets under fire. I don’t like it.”

But the sergeant stood John’s friend, and the lieutenant presently found that his first apprehension at least was unfounded. There was no elegance in John’s riding, it was true, but the big-limbed beast they chose for him, with a mouth like a steel trap and the obstinacy of a Government mule, soon discovered that it had found its master. “Ye-es he’ll get along,” the lieutenant said, “and p’r’aps keep his own skin safe; but I doubt if he will do much more.”

John was privately of the lieutenant’s opinion when it was retailed to him by the friendly Mike;

but he kept his ideas to himself and only worked harder than ever. Half of every day he was put through severe cavalry drill, the rest of the time being sent on courier duty far and wide. Yet, hard as the work was, he enjoyed the life, and wrote cheerfully to his mother, receiving glowing letters in reply. Mrs. Burletson was brimming over with pride at the President's note and prophesied for John a future of dazzling brilliance. He smiled at her words, but laid the letter down almost impatiently. It was strange that his mother, of all people, should think that he had volunteered to win glory and honour for himself. Surely she knew that while she lived the career of a soldier was not for him. Seth's release once secured, he would go home. Seth's safety was the beginning and end of his campaign; meanwhile he must do his duty. Sometimes John brooded over the risks he would soon begin to run, and then he wondered whether he was a coward; but his mother's grief if he were killed troubled him more than his own danger. After all, she was well provided for as far as money went, and she had Jean, who would be a real daughter to her now.

John's training lasted until the 1st of May, when the advance southward began. He had now to take his place as a soldier, and from earliest dawn until the last gleam of daylight he was in the saddle. It was hard work. Sometimes he would lose his way in the forest and wander about for hours before he could find it again, or come unexpectedly upon a hidden swamp into which his horse would plunge, to the imminent danger of both sinking hopelessly in the mud-

dy slime. Often he would have to ride from sunrise to sunset without bite or sup under a blazing sun. He had to learn to take all such incidents as part of the day's work. Then there was the danger of falling into the enemy's hands, a thing to be avoided at all costs by couriers lest the rebels should gain important news by deciphering the despatches. Over the camp fire at night the couriers told many a grim tale of hair-breadth escapes and of what captured men suffered in the Southern prisons. The accounts were so revolting that John turned sceptical at once, and was only convinced of their truth by a melancholy confirmation by Hornber. The sergeant knew of John's plans concerning Santanelle—told under promise of secrecy—and he was hugely interested though puzzled.

"I can't make out the kind of man you are," he said one evening, "not one little bit. Yet it is my business to try, for Uncle Billy's words stay by me all the time. What could bring a man fixed as you were in business to volunteer in just this way—that's what besets me. I cannot think why this one man int'rests you so powerfully. Some men might do it for him. There's been cranks by the mile in our country since the war began, but you ain't one of that stock. Leastways if you be, the rest of your machinery is put together in a wonderful way. Tell me what it is."

But John laughed and said he was too tired. Then they discussed the question of the hour.

Dalton, the position held by General Johnston, was just ahead. It had taken two weeks to do what

John in his ignorance thought would be done in two days. But they were there at last, and the first real tussle of the campaign was at hand. In these discussions, in which all the couriers who happened to be awake took part, John was no longer a mere listener. His careful study of former campaigns gave him knowledge which the rest were quick to see. He seldom advanced an opinion without being asked, but when he had given his views he stuck to them tenaciously; arguments rarely beat his notions out of him. This, together with the zeal and diligence he put into his work, gave him a position in the corps, and few remembered that with it all he was a mere recruit, who had, so far, never been under fire. John himself, however, knew it well. The night before the first battle he slept little, thinking of the chances of the morrow; but the next morning he rose as usual, before the rest, and was ready to face all fate might bring. The first to rise, he was the first to report himself, and whether from this reason, or some other, he heard to his great satisfaction that he was to wait orders from the general. Sherman looked at John with a sharp and critical eye as he handed him a letter.

“You will take this to General McPherson. Do you know where he is?”

“The Sugar Valley, General.”

“How long will it take you to get there?”

John made a rapid calculation of distances.

“Two hours, General.”

“You know your way?”

“I will find it.”

"See that you keep to time. How do you like it now?"

"First rate, General."

"H'm, wait till you have smelt powder. You will do it to-day, and perhaps have little else to live on for a time. We shall see how you like that."

John was piqued at the general's manner, and as he rode off to find Hornber to ask the way to Sugar Valley, he determined that, come what might, he would prove to Sherman that he was mistaken. Hornber was on the lookout for him.

"How long will it take to ride to McPherson?" was John's first question.

He had answered the general to the best of his knowledge; but experience had taught him that distances were often deceptive.

"That's your job? Thunder! Uncle Billy's put you in for a tall contract this time—no mistake!"

"How long will it take me?"

"Depends. If you get there—I say *if*—you may calc'ate on a four or five hours' run."

John patted his horse's neck.

"We've to do it in two."

Hornber gave a grunt of contempt.

"Two? Who said that?"

"I did. Sherman asked me. Afterward he said it must be done in that time."

"Sherman's—well, never mind. But I tell you it is impossible. The way to Sugar Valley is the worst to find anywhere round, and 'twill be swarming with rebs. Why, it's twenty miles bee line."

"I know it; that's why I said two hours."

"You were a fool," was the rough answer. "And your foolishness will likely be your death. Bee line indeed, man. The rebs are between us and McPherson. You'll have to go round miles and then take a hundred chances. But this talk won't get you there. Got a compass?"

"I have."

"Well, then, strike southeast direct for about five miles, until you come to timber. Then turn south and hold to that course till you make McPherson's lines. Bait your horse and yourself well first."

John settled himself in his saddle.

"That will wait till we get there. Good-bye!"

He went off at a brisk hand gallop, while Hornber stood and cursed.

"Darned hard, I say. It *is* hard. Darn Unele Billy! I never knew his like for driving a willing horse to death. Why don't he send trash on such an errand? There's nothing in that despatch, I'll swear there ain't. It is too bad to throw away the chances of such a one as John. Blast it all!"

John rode fast and straight—not too hard, for the horse must be spared at first; but without turning aside for obstacles such as he would have carefully avoided the day before. Sherman's words still rankled, and he was in no pleasant mood. But he knew more than Hornber about the despatch, and was sure that its importance could not be exaggerated. There was some comfort in feeling that he had been intrusted with it.

The couriers in the American war were better

posted concerning the enemy's movements than very many of their officers. Their work cultivated quickness of perception to the highest point, and they often heard orders given of which no one else was aware, but which they religiously communicated to each other. Thus John knew that McPherson, who had moved his division south of Dalton, was out-flanking Johnston, and he shrewdly suspected that the despatch he bore was an order from Sherman to move forward at all speed and prevent the enemy from fortifying himself on the heights of Resaca, a few miles south. Very much might depend upon the early delivery of the despatch.

As John thought of all this he rode harder and harder. All went well for a few miles. His horse was fresh and powerful, the ground was hard and safe. Then came the turn to the south, and a change crept over everything. It was sultry weather, and the perspiration streamed from man and horse. John wondered whether he had urged his beast too hard. But his thoughts soon took another turn, for a breeze from the south bore with it a dull muttering sound. Was it thunder? No. John smiled at his mistake. It was the distant boom of artillery. Had any old friend seen John's face just now, he would have observed it change in a curious way; the gentleness characteristic of the man even under the stress of sore trouble and affliction had suddenly disappeared; while his eyes brightened, the outlines of the face hardened until they stood out square and prominent, and the lips closed tightly upon one another. The sound of those guns had changed John

from a peaceful farmer to a fighter keen as the blade of the sword he wore. John's horse knew this, for his rider pressed his sides with a sudden grip and pricked him with the spur which he had not used before. The way grew tiresome and difficult; the apology of a road John had been following hitherto died away altogether, and his course lay through forest with thick undergrowth. As he forced his way through it the grim shade of the trees closed above him till he might be compared to some insect struggling through long grass. Would he ever come out alive? But this question did not trouble him. He pushed on, plunging deeper and deeper into the forest's unknown depths, his mind and soul full of one thing only—the guns. Toward the place where the battle was raging he pressed on with all his speed. He forgot Hornber's warning, where Dalton lay, or where Johnston's army might be. He heard the artillery fire growing steadily louder. There was the Union army and General McPherson. The only thought in his mind now was, how to get the letter there in time.

CHAPTER XVII.

ONE hour had passed and forty-five minutes of another, and John was still plunging on through the forest, and seemed as far from his journey's end as ever. The ground was very uneven, and though in the uplands, where the trees were of sparser growth and the soil drier, he was able to proceed at a fair pace; in the hollows the surface was a mere sponge of black oozy mud, into which his horse sank to the fetlocks. But on they went, slipping and sliding down hill, scrambling up, horse and man plastered with evil-smelling slime and choked with thirst, yet full of spirit still; for louder and ever louder came the sound of the guns.

John strained his eyes and ears now to the uttermost for signs of the armies, friend or foe. A courier who is up to his work will have the senses and craft of a backwoodsman, especially the quick ear and keen sight. But John possessed none of these things, and with the heedlessness of inexperience he forced his way onward much too fast until he came without warning into imminent danger. He would have been a lost man but for his horse. This beast, however, had been on such work before, and no sooner did he scent the approach of his kind than he stopped of

his own accord and suspiciously sniffed the air. John looked about and listened. Nothing was to be seen, but he could hear the faint swish of hoofs tramping over swampy ground ahead. He was in one hollow, they in the next, and this gave him a minute to think. They might be friends, but this must not be counted upon. If they were enemies, he was in an ugly situation. To escape he must mount the rising ground behind, where he would be in full view at short range. If they did not shoot him or his horse, he would have to make a wider detour to escape them, and waste many precious minutes. It was no time, however, for regrets. Delay was better than capture. He turned and spurred his horse, which responded gallantly. Halfway up the rise he heard the *ping* of rifle bullets, and turned in the saddle to see a dozen men in slouch hats blazing at him as coolly as if he were a partridge. They did not trouble themselves to ride after him, but sat and fired three at a time. Forward went John's body over the saddle bow, home went his spurs again, and the horse bounded on like a mad creature. They reached the crest of the hill in safety, and John saw that most of the men had started in pursuit. One, however, kept still, taking slow and careful aim. *Crack!* the bullet sang through the air and hit his horse in the shoulder. The poor beast stumbled, staggered, and fell; but John had time to clear his feet of the stirrups and leap to the ground. His misfortune was greeted with a loud yell, and the rebels dashed up the hill toward him, sure of their prize. But John paid no attention to their shouts. The possibility of his

horse being hit had occurred to him before and he had thought of a way to meet it. To the left of the rise, stretching southward for some distance, was a low-lying treacherous morass. John had carefully avoided it, thinking, as he passed, what a pleasant place it would be for an army to come upon in a dark night. Now, it was his one chance of escape. As the enemy galloped up to the wounded horse, John ran down the slope. He calculated that for a short distance he could out-pace the horses over such rough ground, and was relieved to see they were well behind when he reached the end of the morass. He leaped in desperately. He might sink to his neck; the enemy might not sink deeper than himself, which would be equally fatal. At the first step the slime reached to his ankles, the next, halfway to his knee; it was cold and sticky and made anything like swift progress out of the question; but it got no worse, and though the shots of the pursuers as they drew nearer came dangerously close, thanks to the reeds and rank vegetation on the surface of the swamp, John escaped harm and was well upon his way by the time the horsemen reached the edge. It was a critical moment now, as the horses were urged upon the quagmire. To John's relief, only one consented to enter, and, falling, narrowly escaped a miserable death. At this, some of the men dismounted and followed John on foot, and he saw that it must now come to a race, to be won by endurance. He measured the distance between himself and his pursuers and deliberately sat down and took off his boots. This brought the rebels terribly near, and they fired upon him with their re-

volvers; but it gave him great advantage later, upon which several of them did the same. John was a fairly good runner and was used to rough ground; moreover, he was in good hard condition and able to stand a great deal of severe exercise. Yet he felt that from the first it was only a matter of time. The Southerners were more active than he. They knew something of swamps, and picked out the best paths, while he went straight through everything fair and foul. One mile—two—still the chase went on. Yet the distance was lessening foot by foot, and the rebels showed no signs of giving up. Unless a change were to come within a very few minutes, he would be taken prisoner—no, not a prisoner—John was determined there. So far, he had not replied to the attack, saving both breath and strength for escape; but he was fully armed. He drew his revolver and cocked it; loosened his knife in its sheath; looked for a tree or a stump or thick bush where he might come to bay and show his teeth at last. Thus searching, he noticed that he was at the edge of the swamp, and that forest land was beginning again, though not of such thick growth as before. Suddenly his eye caught something more—something directly in front not half a mile away, neither a tree nor a bush, but a man with his back toward him, leaning upon a rifle. The discovery gave new strength to John's weary limbs and muscles; but it still remained to be ascertained whether the man's uniform was blue or gray. He stood in the shade, and at first John could not see how he was clad; then he moved to one side and, seeing the approaching figure, covered it with his rifle.

At the same moment a rift of sunlight struck upon his coat. The coat was blue. John waved his arms and shouted "Friend!" with all the strength that was in him, and redoubled his speed; while the enemy paused, hesitated, fired a few desultory shots, and turned back. By the time John had reached the sentry, a picket of a dozen men had come to his support, most of whom, at sight of the sorry figure before them, laughed till they were weak. Mud, black and shining, encrusted John's face, mud clung in clots to his hair, and covered his coat and trousers so completely that the corporal in charge of the picket suggested that he should be scraped to see if he really were a Union man. John, when he got his breath, laughed too, and begged for the loan of some decent garments before he was conducted to General McPherson. But this was denied him, and, dripping and disreputable, he was led at once to the commander of the troops. McPherson received him kindly, and, ordering him to refresh himself, provided another horse and gave him a letter for General Sherman. John rested an hour, and then sat out on his homeward journey. He found that the Confederates he had met belonged to a brigade of cavalry retreating before McPherson's advance. The return ride was accomplished without adventure, but the way was so difficult to find and the country so bad for traveling that it was after dark when he reached the lines at last, and reported to Lieutenant Snelling. Hornber was with the lieutenant, and both men exclaimed when they saw John, the sergeant gripping his hand till it ached.

"Resurrected, so help me!" he shouted. "I never expected to see you this side of anywhere again. We guessed you was plugged for sure. The general has sent twice to inquire; he's powerful interested in you."

"In my despatches? I will take them to him."

John found Sherman inside his tent. He read the letter and smiled.

"McPherson has done it handsomely," he exclaimed to his officers. "If he follows up, we shall do."

Then he turned to John:

"You delivered my note?"

"Yes, General."

"What time from here?"

"Three hours thirty-five minutes."

"I thought you were going in two."

"I did not know how bad the country was when I said that."

"You should not have said it, then. Did you have any accident?"

"My horse was shot."

"You did not mention that. Shot him yourself, by mistake?"

John was too tired to smile.

"I ran upon a patrol of rebel cavalry, General, and was fired on and chased, and my horse fell."

"What did you do?"

"Ran it on foot."

"How far?"

"Two miles, as far as I can reckon."

"Pshaw! Can you beat horses? You said the rebs were cavalrymen, remember."

John, thus questioned, was obliged against his will to relate all that had happened. When he mentioned the loss of his boots, Sherman took up a lantern and examined his legs.

"By George, friends," he said to his staff, "he tells the truth. There is not a boot to him.—Go on—how did you get through?"

John told him. Then the general said:

"I will tell you something. I gave you a really tough bit of work to-day. I thought you knew too much, and did too little. I see that I made a mistake, and I will not forget it. Go to your supper; you deserve a better one than you will get."

When Hornber heard John's adventure he laughed loud and long.

"What a doggoned fool you must have been to put your head so far into the hornet's nest before you found them out! You are not sharp enough for our work yet, John—not by a hundred miles. Still, you have pleased Uncle Billy. You are on the right track with him, and that is everything."

John did not see how this could be. He said all he had shown was a capacity for running away. He had certainly got through with the message, but he had been an hour and a half behind the time. He would have argued the matter from this point of view, but Hornber laughed him down.

"That is all you can see in it, Johnny, yourself? Well, I'm blest! There—go to sleep—I am not going to say another word. Leave it in Uncle Billy's

hands. You've no need to do more, or think the least. Turn in, man, and go to sleep."

For a few days John was put on light duty, as the ride and the run had exhausted him more than he knew. Then back he went to his work again, which, as the army was now in the midst of active operations, was harder than ever.

The force under Sherman amounted to ninety-eight thousand men of all arms. It was divided into three armies—the Army of the Cumberland, under General Thomas; the Army of the Tennessee, under General McPherson; and the Army of the Ohio, under General Schofield. Sherman himself was with the Army of the Cumberland, the most important of the three. Since the 1st day of May these armies had been closing in upon the Confederates under General Joseph E. Johnston, who had only fifty thousand effective troops. But though the Federals outnumbered the enemy, they were in a hostile country, and were obliged to bring with them a huge supply-train. This had to be strongly guarded, and drew considerable strength from the attacking force; while the Confederates, besides being able to collect supplies as they needed them and obtained information from the friendly inhabitants of their adversaries' movements, occupied strongly fortified positions, which could be held against a much larger force than their own. Sherman began his attacks by attempting to drive the Confederates from their intrenchments by direct assault; but this resulted in so much loss that he decided to turn the position. To do this it was necessary to leave the railroad by which

his supplies reached him, and storing up twenty days' rations in wagons, strike for the heart of the country, his armies proceeding by different routes, to converge at a point south of the main positions occupied by the enemy. By this means Sherman hoped to induce Johnston to evacuate his strongholds for the purpose of guarding the country below and thereby give him battle on equal terms. The danger of the plan to the Union army was that, being cut off from its base of supplies, it might run short of food before gaining command of the railroads to the south, which were now in Confederate hands. The chief difficulties of the march were the bad roads, the forests and swamps through which they must force their way, and, worst of all, ignorance of the enemy's movements, together with the disadvantage that their own designs would probably be ascertained from the first. Even to keep up constant communication between the armies was difficult enough and had to be done solely by couriers. This formed the basis of John's work.

He soon began to understand his business, and learned to slip past detachments of the enemy without attracting notice; to exchange revolver shots with the cavalry picket and ride away under fire without the quiver of an eyelid; to dash past a line of skirmishers and hear the musket balls patter round him like hail; and, worst of all, to ride steadily about his business while shells screamed overhead and burst far and near, and men were falling on every side, torn in pieces by the bombs. He was often hailed by wounded men wanting help, crying for water—always for water; others shrieking and blaspheming in

their agony. Where occasion allowed, John stopped to give what help he could, but more often he had to harden his heart and hasten on. The succour of the wounded was not for him.

John saw little of the commander-in-chief, except to receive and take messages and pass on his sharp decisive orders. But, even by acting as orderly to Sherman, John's practical knowledge of the position of affairs rapidly increased and widened his grasp of military matters. The discussion among the couriers in camp had ceased now, the men being too wearied with their long rides to talk. But John and the sergeant still kept up the custom.

The progress of Sherman's march was slow and uncertain. McPherson's army had forged ahead; Schofield's on the left flank was many miles in the rear; while between them, separated from each, was the Army of the Cumberland. The difficulties of the situation culminated on the 25th of May by an unexpected meeting with the enemy by the Army of the Cumberland not far from the point where the Union forces should have concentrated. At this place the Confederates were massed in considerable strength, a circumstance not anticipated by Sherman, who, however, knowing the importance of carrying the position, ordered an immediate attack. The order was obeyed vigorously, though the men were tired after a long day's march; but it resulted in nothing, for the Confederates were well protected in heavy timber and repulsed the attack. When darkness came on the fighting stopped, leaving both armies in some confusion, for the forest growth was thick,

and the rain was coming down in torrents. The muddle soon became fearful. Not only was the battle completely quenched, but it is related that both Confederates and Federals severally lost their ways, straggled in large numbers into one another's camps, discovered their mistakes, and slipped out again without a shot being fired. John, who was conveying a message from General Schofield to Sherman, after a vain attempt to find his commander, groped about until he came to a fallen tree, to which he tied his horse, sitting down beneath it to rest. It was pitch dark, and he hunted for matches to light a pipe. He had just found that his box was lost, when some one tripped over his feet and nearly fell on top of him. The voice of the man who tripped and who began cursing loudly was Sergeant Hornber's. John made himself known, and they sat side by side and grumbled; then talked of the present situation, unconscious that at the other side of the log lay General Sherman. He had lost his way like many another officer that night, and was trying to snatch a few hours of sleep.

CHAPTER XVIII.

SERGEANT HORNER, in common with most of the army at this particular time, was in a very bad temper; and he made use of language to relieve his feelings which we will not write down.

"Gol-darn the whole of this blasted business!" he growled, as he rubbed his shins. "Did you ever see an army in a beastlier fix? But why do I ask you that? A blasted recruit like you ain't seen anything."

"I want to light my pipe—got a match?"

"No—got nothing but bruises and an infernally empty stomach. What the darnation did he run us into this cursed hole for? Tell me that, you who know everything."

John chuckled. He was cross and hungry, but it is always soothing to find a man who is in a worse temper than one's self.

"Who do you mean by 'he'?"

"Uncle Billy, of course—who else?"

The man on the other side of the log began to listen attentively.

"You are wrong there," John said. "It is not his fault, it is Joey Hooker's."

"How do you make that out?"

"You know where we are?"

"Not I—nor care."

"If there were any way of getting a light, I would show you my map."

"Map?" exclaimed Hornber. "I thought Uncle Billy had 'em all."

John laughed.

"He had, but I have scratched out a new one since."

"The devil you have!" muttered Sherman to himself.

"Last night," John said, "I made out from it that we—I mean the Army of the Cumberland—were marching upon Dallas, intending to join McPherson, who is ahead, to-night or to-morrow. Joey Hooker, who was in advance, split his corps into three divisions for convenience of marching. The first of these ran into a force of reb cavalry which were firing a bridge on Pumpkin Vine Creek—the same bridge we crossed this afternoon. The rebs were driven off, and Hooker, after putting out the blaze, must needs give chase with one division."

"Oh, that is fighting Joe all over," Hornber cried with an oath.

"The cavalry retreated toward Marietta, to the right of Dallas, and one division, Geary's, instead of marching on to Dallas, stuck to the rebs, and were hoping to chaw them up, when they were met here by infantry, who gave them blow for blow, and stopped the fun. I had been sent with a message to Geary when up came Hooker and Sherman himself, and I heard Uncle Billy order Hooker to go straight ahead

—for the rebs were now giving way—and secure this position, which is at the cross-road they call ‘New Hope,’ the mission house the boys spoke of last night. If Hooker had done that, we should be in a far better fix than we are. But Joey would not budge. He had an obstinate fit on and waited for re-enforcements. I went to fetch them and rode all I knew, but before they arrived the enemy had increased his force, the attack failed, and here we are. It is a mess indeed.”

Hornber laughed.

“Johnny, of all the cusses I ever struck, you know the most. If Sherman heard ye, he’d give you a commission to keep your mouth shut. I know he would.”

“As I never open my mouth to any but you, it is rough you should say that,” said John warmly.

“Well, I’ll take it back,” was the rejoinder. “Now, tell me how we’ll get out of this mess.”

“I don’t rightly know,” John replied slowly. “I reckon Sherman will try to take the cross-roads yet. But I fear the rebs are likely to be too strong for us. If that turns out to be so, we must wait until McPherson can get round. He will be advancing on Dallas now, and have to turn back. That he will not like.”

“But what do we want with this darned ‘New Hope,’ anyhow? Hell-hole would be a better name. Dallas was our objective.”

“No, at least not according to my idea, though Sherman wants the rebs to think so. It is the railroad.”

“What for—supplies?”

“That is it. We have got a few days’ rations in the wagons, but we can’t hold this country or get through it unless we keep the rails clear behind us to bring all we need. At present the rebs have them tight from Kingston—where we left them to start for Dallas—to Marietta, twenty-five miles southeast. Unless we force this cross-roads, there is no way for the army to get to the railroad. Now—we must get there, or retreat. The only chance is that when McPherson comes back we will outflank Johnston here and push him out. If McPherson is held at Dallas, we will have to see another way, and that will be hard to find—unless the struggle here compels Johnston to withdraw from Allatoona, twelve miles north, where he controls the road to Kingston. And even if it does, I do not know how he could get to know it.”

“What should be done then, General Burletson?”

Hornber yawned until his jaw nearly cracked. He was very sleepy, yet wanted to hear more. John did not answer.

“Tell me, now,” the sergeant said, waking up, “what are your ideas if McPherson does not come at once? I want to know.”

“If I have any notion, it is worth nothing.”

“Quite likely it ain’t; but you must tell it to me.”

“You want sleep more than my ideas.”

“The truth. But I will have the ideas first. Come, boy, spit ’em out.”

“Well,” said John at last, “as I said, if we do not turn Johnston out of Allatoona or take his position here, we would have to retreat or find another way

of securing the railroad. I think we ought to prospect around the railroad where the rebs hold it, and get accurate and complete information of their movements. We know mighty little of them, it seems to me, and generally find they know everything about us."

"Very pretty sentiments," grumbled the sergeant, "only I seem to have heard 'em before. How to do it?"

"Play one of Jeb Stuart's pranks, and detail a picked body of men, well mounted, to take a curve clean round the reb armies as he did round ours in Virginia. I don't know—but it seems to me something useful might come of that."

Hornber scratched his head.

"I see daylight there, John. But our boys would soon be captured fooling about in a strange country."

"That might happen, but if they were smart and could ride they would have a rare chance to escape. I should make every man carry provisions for a couple of days, and give orders to all that if attacked they were to scatter and return in couples or even alone to report. If only one came back, Sherman might get information that would be worth a good deal to him."

"You go and tell him so," Hornber rejoined with a dry chuckle, yawning again. "You are a genius, Johnny; you should be a general—I said so first time I saw ye—and now I'm off to sleep to think it over."

He curled himself up against the log and was soon snoring with deep regularity. John thought he

would follow suit; but not finding his position comfortable and concluding to try the other side, looked over. He immediately came into collision with some one.

"What do you want now?" said a voice he knew, which made him jump back with a gasp.

"General—I——"

"Did not know I was there. Perhaps not; but I have been all the time."

There was an awful pause. John was so shocked that he could not say a word; there was indeed nothing he could say.

"Burlington, is it not?"

"Yes, General."

"I thought so. Are you sleepy?"

"Not now, General."

"Then answer my questions. How would you get cavalry, even a scouting party, through such an infernal country as this?"

Sherman's tone was severely contemptuous—perhaps designedly so. It put John on his mettle.

"My idea, General," he answered, with deference but without hesitation, "would be, not to send more than a dozen or twenty at most. We couriers are doing nothing else."

"I know a courier thinks he can beat creation. But we are not all couriers. Could you do it yourself? Answer straight now. Would you, if you had a handful of men, undertake to wander around the enemy's positions and pick up any intelligence worth anything? Let me tell you this before you speak. I would not give a cent for the lives of any

men who fell into Johnston's hands just now. Would you chance it?"

"I would, indeed, General."

"He would—would he?" Sherman muttered to himself. "Then"—he paused to weigh the thought in his mind before, with characteristic impetuosity, he struck the nail on the head—"then, by G—d, he shall!"

"Burlington," he said in a tone from which all sarcasm had gone, "there is something in this plan. I will give you the credit, whether by accident or natural ability, of having stumbled upon a sensible notion, worth putting through. Have you learned cavalry drill?"

John began to recover his spirits.

"Yes, General."

"So. Then we will see. Now, let me have the map of which you and Hornber robbed me."

By the time the sergeant awakened from his slumbers the general had departed, and John said nothing about his presence there. Breakfast was the first thing to find, and hardly had it been disposed of when the order came for attack, and the work of the day began. The fighting lasted until night without much result, the position of the Confederates being as strong as ever; and every one was sulky and disappointed. John alone was cheerful. He wondered what Sherman was planning, and whether it would be his good fortune to take part in the experiment. He forgot the obligation he was under to his mother to avoid all unnecessary risk, and longed for the interest and excitement of such dangerous work. Late in

the night a courier came and reported to his comrades that McPherson was hemmed in at Dallas and could not stir a man to help the Army of the Cumberland. John did not sleep much after this.

Next morning early summons came for John from the commander-in-chief. Sherman was at breakfast—dry bread and cold meat, which he ate astride of a wooden keg, and washed down with coffee drunk from a tin mug. As John saluted, the general looked at him very keenly.

“Are you sound in body?” were his first words. “No wounds?”

“None, General.”

“Then take this note to Colonel Pantling, of General Stoneman’s division of cavalry. You will find them on the left wing, in front of General Schofield’s corps. Return here as soon as possible. Read the note.”

He handed him the letter and went on with his breakfast, watching John’s face out of the corner of his eye. The note was brief and very much to the point, as all Sherman’s letters were.

“To Colonel Pantling, U. S. Cavalry.”

“COLONEL: Please supply the bearer, my courier, John Burletson, with ten of your smartest troopers. He had better pick them. All must be well mounted and provided with provisions and ammunition for a week. They will be under Burletson’s command. I want the men for special duty, and have ordered him to return with them for my personal inspection this afternoon.

WILLIAM T. SHERMAN,

“Major General Commanding.”

CHAPTER XIX.

WHEN Sherman's couriers heard the news about John, they were too much surprised even to swear. When they recovered, the criticisms of the general's choice were extremely vigorous, every one prophesying failure, even Sergeant Hornber, though he began by defending his friend against the insinuation of political favouritism.

"You lie!" he said, with an oath; "the boy is straight, a damned sight straighter than any one here. Raw? That may be, but not one of you has ever worked harder or better. He can ride, and I will bet that he can fight; while for head-piece he'll beat the crowd. No—that boy will plan out his ideas like a map, an' he'll do his level best, but he'll fail at last. It is not in him to take hold of men. He won't have an idea of commanding; he can't, for he's never done it. He was not brought up to it. I don't go much on officers, as you all know; but a real one, a good West Point man—oh, you may yell," as a general howl of dissent greeted the word; "I know what I am saying, and you don't. I say a good West Pointer, such as Uncle Billy or Grant—or, be darned to 'em, like those Southerners, Lee, and Jackson, and Joe Johnston—there's a something that makes a cuss

obey and follow blind. West Pointers are trained to it. We ain't. Take John. He's patient and gentle—obstinate too in his way; but Stoneman's troopers, even ten of 'em, will want more than that. Every last one will think he knows more than Johnny. Each will play his own game, and the whole bunch be taken prisoners by the rebs. That's my opinion."

The rest were unanimous that the party would not get to work at all.

"I know Pantling," said one. "He's an ugly brute. If he parts with a trooper, much less ten, I'll eat my hat; he'll send the boy back to Sherman quicker than he went. You'll see. Then Uncle Billy will rar' round and tell John to quit. I was under Pantling once; he'll bully-rag and cuss John till he'll give his life to clear out of range of the colonel's tongue. Pshaw! he'll not be in it."

John, if he had been given leisure to think about himself, would probably have agreed in the main with Hornber. But he had no time to think. As he rode to General Stoneman's lines, he thought only of the work before him; and wondered whether Sherman would leave it to his discretion where he went, or work out a route for him. The men must be carefully selected, that was important; equally so was the quality and condition of their horses. As for provisions, with all respect to the general, John determined that a supply for two days would be sufficient. They ought to ride as light as possible. Also they must be disguised, so that, if necessary, they would pass the enemy's outposts without attracting attention, and purchase a meal now and then from farms or

even outlying houses of small towns and villages, and pick up news. All these things and more passed through John's mind before he reached Colonel Pantling's tent and presented his letter to an orderly there. As Hornber said, "he could plan his ideas out like a map." He had now to execute them.

Lieutenant-Colonel Pantling was smoking a choice cigar when the note from General Sherman reached his hands. There were not many officers in the Atlanta campaign who indulged themselves in this manner at ten o'clock in the morning; but the cavalry had not much to do just now, and Colonel Pantling partook freely at all times of the good things of life. He was a large and heavy man, with a puffy face; his eyes were bloodshot, with inflamed lids, his cheeks flabby, his nose extremely red, and, worst sign of all, his hand shook all the time he was reading Sherman's note. His face, however, was not without good points; his forehead was square; he had a heavy fighting chin, while a pair of thick, black eyebrows gave an impressiveness to eyes that held within them a tigerish fierceness not pleasant to meet. Drinker the colonel might be; violent in temper and sensual in disposition; but he was neither a fool nor a coward, and no man who could avoid it ever "crossed his line of fire."

"Ten of my smartest men," he muttered, "to be commanded by—*what?* a courier! By Gad, Sherman is clean off the rails—mad or drunk, or both."

He looked at the orderly.

"Send that courier here."

When Colonel Pantling saw John's quiet face he

smiled grimly beneath his mustache. John did not see the smile, but in the colonel's eyes there was an expression he did not like.

"Who are you?"

"John Burltson, courier to General Sherman."

"Do you know the contents of this letter?"

"The general gave it to me to read, Colonel."

"In that case," muttered Pantling to himself, "there can be no doubt. He is quite mad."

Aloud he said with slow, contemptuous emphasis, "What are you going to do about it?"

"Obey orders, Colonel."

"*My* orders—yes. Why, the thing is absurd. My boys would eat a man like you. Anyway, I cannot spare them at present—not one. You may go."

The colonel put the letter into his pocket, nodded carelessly, and took up a newspaper he had been reading.

John looked at him in amazement. Such a reception as this to an order from the commander-in-chief had not entered his head. For a moment he stood speechless, wondering if it were a practical joke.

"What answer am I to take to General Sherman, Colonel?"

Colonel Pantling turned upon him.

"You here still? If you don't leave my tent sharp, my man, you will be under arrest in less than a minute!"

John saluted respectfully.

"Will you be good enough to tell me, Colonel, how I am to get the boys? It will take all my time to

complete my arrangements and report to the commander-in-chief before sundown. I would like to start at once."

The colonel sprang up with an oath, and took a step toward John as though he would have struck him.

John did not move an inch.

"I don't wish to inconvenience you any, sir," he went on in his quietest tone, "but I am bound to see this through."

Colonel Pantling glared at him for a minute or two without speaking, then suddenly laughed.

"Curse you, but you have sand anyway. There are not many men who could face me so."

He threw away his cigar and buckled on his sword.

"I am going to inspect the men myself," he said, frowning again. "Come with me. As to your picking any, I will see you damned first!"

He spoke with a savage aggressiveness that would have goaded a quick-tempered man to a retort; but John did not speak, standing aside for the colonel to pass first from the tent. Then he swung himself into the saddle and waited while Pantling gave an order to one of his subalterns. Presently a company of troopers, all well mounted, smart, soldierly men, formed up before their commander.

"Boys, I have received a message from General Sherman asking for ten of you for some expedition—to be under command of this courier. I never disregard the wishes of my superiors, so you shall hear what the man has to say.—Now," turning to John,

“tell the men all you know, and see what they will answer.”

“I have your permission, Colonel, to address them?”

“If they will listen.”

At this some of the men laughed, while others made remarks upon John's personal appearance. But he did not hear them; he was not thinking of himself; his mind was full of what he had been sent to do, and this took away all nervousness, all un readiness of speech, even the irritation caused by the colonel's manner. With erect mien and stern face, John rode up to the men who were laughing at him and looked down the line with an observant, critical eye.

“Your colonel has told you why I am here. I understand you are the smartest men in this regiment. I hope so, for the general has no use for any but the best. I want ten of you on the best horses you can find. Our business will be to ride round Johnston's army as Jeb Stuart rode round ours in Virginia. It will be work of the toughest kind, night work mostly, and we shall be in danger all the while. If the rebs get upon our track we shall have the tightest kind of a time and have to race them for life. If we fail to get away there will be no quarter; but if we are successful it is likely that the army will have cause to be grateful to you. Our orders will come direct from the general himself. He will inspect every man I bring away with me, and you know what that means if you do your duty.”

He paused to mark the effect of his words. The men were silent. There were no more personal re-

marks or laughter. Whatever this man might be to look at, he spoke the truth, he was in earnest, and he was not afraid of men.

“One thing more. The colonel has said I am to command. That is true, and if the raid is a failure I shall get the blame; while if it succeeds, each of you will have his share of praise and profit. Now, tell me, how many of you will pull this through with me?”

He rode slowly down the line, and Colonel Pantling, who was expecting a roar of laughter, was startled by a rousing cheer and a shout that was unmistakable.

John wheeled and cantered up to him.

“With your permission, Colonel, I will pick my men from this company. More than half have volunteered.”

“Why don’t you take them all, curse you!” was the reply, the colonel now beginning to lose his temper entirely. “Take the regiment! Take me! If once they let such roughs as you get into the army, it is time for us to leave.”

John saluted, calm and imperturbable.

“I understand that I have your permission.”

“Yes!” roared the colonel, holding down his rage by main force as he saw that any further display of it would make him ridiculous. Pick them, and be d—d!”

John needed no second bidding. With a matter-of-fact air that would have astounded Sergeant Hornber, he ordered the men to file past him, making them do so three times before he made his choice. An in-

terview with the quartermaster followed, and a minute examination of kits, arms, and horses. Here John proved very hard to please, his quickness in detecting defects and good points strengthening his position with his men in a way that nothing else could have done.

All this took time, and it was getting late before he was able to report himself to the general. Sherman was engaged, and sent word that the men were to come for inspection in an hour. This interval John spent with his old companions, who complimented him upon the smart appearance of his troopers and gave him warm congratulations. Hornber alone made no remark, but afterward, when alone with John, he said in his most abrupt tone:

"Boy, the way you have acted gets right away with me. I never thought to see a man change as you have since this morning. You'll command a regiment before long, or I'm a liar."

"Just about what you must be, I reckon," John retorted without smiling. Reaction had come after the excitement, and he felt tired and out of sorts.

"I was this morning," Hornber said with a solemn shake of the head; "I ain't now."

"Simple foolishness. What are ten men?"

"Don't matter. They want handling, specially men from the cavalry. Now, mark me, this is the thin edge of the wedge, as they say."

"To another world," John interrupted. "I have the feeling all through me that I shall never get out of it alive, and that will mean that I have broken

my word. My God! Hornber, I should never have come South at all."

The sergeant gasped.

"Eh! what? you croaking! *You!* Blame it all, Johnny, what do you mean?"

John's face worked, and he clinched his hands.

"I am thinking of my mother, old friend. 'Tis not myself. God knows my life is not worth much to me. But I swore that while she lived I would keep away from *this*. For the sake of my—friend and her friend I came South to try and get a man out of Santanelle prison. I knew I must take risks for that. But this is different. It is another line altogether. I ought to have refused to go; but I did not think, when Sherman spoke. He gave me no warning. Never said a word until he put the letter into my hand. It is too late to step back now."

"Too late!" roared Hornber, finding speech at last. "You would deserve to be hanged by the neck if you thought of such a thing. What are you made of, anyhow? The chance that has rolled to your feet, not a private in the whole army but would sell his soul to buy. Carry this through in the way I believe now, s'elp me, that you will, and you are bound to get on. Once Uncle Billy grips a man, he stays right by him. He will never fail to give you an opportunity. Your fortune in the army has been made to-day and before you've served three months, and yet you croak. Are you all there?"

John smiled.

"Don't worry. I have gone too far to draw out again, I know, and I will do my best. I was wrong

to be in it, though; I did not join the army, friend, to get promotion. But time is up. I shall not see you again, as we shall start at moonrise."

They shook hands.

"Where do you strike for first?"

John laughed.

"That's for the rebs to discover, Sergeant, if they can."

CHAPTER XX.

THE failure of General Hooker to carry the position at the "New Hope" cross-roads before the enemy occupied it in force placed the Union army in an awkward position. It was the critical point of the campaign—no one really knew how much so but Sherman; yet from the general to the rank and file there was a feeling of uneasiness which a few days more of desultory marching and countermarching, fighting through deep forests under torrents of rain, and ankle deep in mud and mire to meet a foe who gave way in one place only to break out in another—would have turned into discouragement and worse. Southern writers have naturally laid stress upon the size of Sherman's army, and attributed his subsequent success to that fact, more than to the skill of its commander or the quality of the troops. But a very large force in an extremely difficult country is a doubtful blessing, and from the commissariat point of view it is the reverse.

This fact was painfully obvious to Sherman the day after he listened to John summing up the weakness of the position to Hornber on the 23d of May. He had abandoned for the time being his base of supplies, trusting that Johnston, finding his flank turned,

would abandon the strong position he held across the railroad, and fall back, leaving the line clear. On the 27th, after four days' fighting, he found that a force too strong to be dislodged without serious loss lay directly in the way of his main army, the Army of the Cumberland; that McPherson, whom he had ordered to his assistance, was several miles away to the east, confronted by a Confederate force at Dallas; and that Schofield, to the left, was separated from the main army by three miles of very difficult country. The situation was critical. The army was dispersed in three fractions, any one of which might be suddenly assailed by the Confederates in full strength; the railway also was exposed and unguarded, and accurate information of the enemy's movements and strength and dispositions was of absolutely vital importance. Hornber had good reason to congratulate John upon the possibilities which his little expedition contained. It was a nervous moment when the general walked out to look at the men, and John did not breathe freely until the inspection had been concluded with a few blunt words of encouragement that were worth more than many speeches from any other man. When it was over, the general took John into his tent, where a map was spread.

"You show me," said Sherman, "just where we are on that."

John did so.

"Now take these compasses. Where would you strike first if left to your own idea?"

John bent over the map and thought for a minute, Sherman noticing with a twinkle in his eye that

the request—unusual, to say the least of it, from a commander-in-chief to a private—was taken by this man quite as a matter of course.

“I should make the railroad, General, right east here between Ackworth and Kingston.” He pointed to Ackworth as he spoke, a small town ten miles away.

“Why so?” Sherman said in a gruff, sceptical tone. “Why not Marietta ten miles south, the southernmost point, as far as we know, that Johnston holds? I expect you to ride round the whole army. Ackworth is about the centre.”

“I know that,” John said, forgetting in the interest of the argument whom he was addressing, “but I take it you will want first of all to find out what he is doing on the railroad line from here to Kingston. My intention was to report to you after I had prospected the line from Ackworth northward, then ride round Kenesaw, Marietta, and Dallas. But to the north first.”

Sherman nodded.

“You have the right notion. I will leave you to work it out. What I require is a clear and correct idea where Johnston lies; the number of men he has in each place; whether he shows any signs of threatening the railroad northward; and as much information concerning his movements as you can get together. I have a good foundation to guess on, as we stand, but guess-work will not do just now. In short, your duty is to find the enemy and count him; but don’t let him find you. Send back a message by a trusty man, when you have found out about the railroad, and report yourself in person in forty-eight hours.

Between then and now, do what you like; go where you like. I will trust you, Burletson."

Sherman spoke with the careful distinctness of one who measures every word and expects it to be remembered. At the end, without unbending the customary sternness of his face, he held out his hand. John took it very respectfully.

"I will do all that is in me, General," he said earnestly, "to bring back what you need."

"So. When do you start?"

"I reckoned we should have light enough by two o'clock. The moon rises an hour before."

"You have food?"

"For two days, General, and a blanket apiece. We have also gray overcoats and flap hats."

"I have no more to say, then."

John walked slowly back to his men. They were asleep, black motionless figures by a dying fire. He pulled the embers together and roused a blaze; studied the map Sherman had given him, then rolled himself in his blanket and slept also. He woke at one o'clock, roused his men and made them eat a meal of bread and coffee. By two o'clock they were on their way, riding by the stars. It was hard riding, for, though the rain had ceased and the sky was clear, the ground was soft and treacherous, their way lying over rough hills of gravelly soil into which their horses sank deeply. John was glad, however, to get over this exposed ground by night, and pushed on steadily, though at a gentle pace. When day dawned they had crossed the railway and found cover in the skirts of some forest land to the east of the road. Through

the trees, here, in a northerly direction, John determined that their course should lie, but after the night ride they must eat and the horses rest. On their left, toward the railway, was a rail fence inclosing a field of corn, and farther away among the trees curled a wreath of smoke. John called a halt and held a council of war. After a careful consideration of his position he had resolved to consult his men before taking any important step, reserving the right to decide every question himself. The point now was, whether it would be wise to seek information at the homestead and perhaps get a meal there, or to find their way by compass and map and observation. John himself suggested the former plan, and was flatly opposed by the spokesman of the men, Bob Spenniker. Spenniker was a little slip of a man, not much over five feet high; he had black, beady eyes which were never still for two consecutive moments; a lean, sinewy body, a brown and wrinkled face, and a head as round as an apple, covered with stiff black hair. He was called "the rat," and well did he deserve the name. His morals were bad, and his language worse; but for endurance, activity, quick wit and courage, there was hardly his equal in the regiment.

"That is wrong," was his answer to John's proposal. "We'll be found out. Do you think you look like a Southerner? Do I—or any of us? Not a little bit. Let's trust to our own ears and eyes, and leave the farms round here alone. That's my advice. They'll have us else. I'll bet you all the whisky ever I hope to drink. You don't know—I do."

He nodded with the calm assurance of superior wisdom, and the men, expecting a meek assent from their leader, winked at one another. But John gave them no satisfaction. He asked for more opinions, and, receiving none, said to Bob Spenniker:

“We differ. I think it is worth while getting to talk with folk round here. There is much to learn from a gossiping woman, whatever her feelings may be. She may let out more than she knows. Halt here, and whistle if there is any danger. I will go on alone.”

He spurred away briskly, making close observance of the farm and buildings as he went. They were in better condition than many he had seen, and the appearance of the woman who opened the door at his call, though she was plainly dressed, was not that of a small farmer's wife.

John raised his hat.

“Good-morning, ma'am.”

“Morning,” she answered with expressionless eyes. “What may your business be?”

“I am a courier. Can you tell me how to strike the nearest way to Allatoona?”

She pointed northward.

“A track to the right of those trees runs into a road that will lead you there.”

“Thank you,” he said. Then, in a careless tone: “Happen you may tell me something I want to know. I am hunting for General Johnston. Will I find him at Allatoona?”

The woman stared hard at her questioner. John

had expected that she would show surprise, even amusement, at such a question. But there was no surprise in that face—a shrewd, strong face he thought, with a lurking suspicion in it.

“The general is there like enough,” she said, slowly; “it is hard telling, for he’s everywhere and anywhere, just where he’s needed most. What d’ye want with him?”

John tapped his breast pocket significantly.

“I have my instructions.”

“Who may you be from?”

“General Hardee, down south.”

The woman gave an intelligent nod, and as John turned to go, called after him.

“Say, Courier, have you breakfasted?”

“Why, no.”

“Come in, then, and have a bit. ’Tain’t often we around here get a soldier so civil spoke as you. Get ye down.”

There was a marked change in her manner now; it was kindness itself. John considered an instant.

“That is very amiable of you, ma’am, but there are ten boys with me. If you have enough for all, I can pay; but I could not leave them out.”

“If their manners are as clever as yours, young man, we’ll not ask for money. If you-uns keep Sherman out, we-uns will feed ye and be glad to do it.”

John galloped back to the boys.

“Trapped!” said Bob Spenniker. “Bet you five dollars down, boss—now!”

“Stay here alone, then,” retorted John sharply, “if it scares you. The rest will follow with me.—Come, boys.”

They followed him, and Bob Spenniker led the way. They tied their horses to a fence near the front door, and were presently eating fried hominy cakes and bacon and beans, and quaffing buttermilk, with great satisfaction. There were no men to be seen, a fact John should have noticed. Bob saw it at once. The only people they could see were the woman who had invited them, and a girl of sixteen; a pretty and graceful damsel, who was all smiles and attention, and received more than one compliment from the men, though Bob, whose eyes were in a dozen different directions at once, gazed at her with intense suspicion. John did not pay much attention to the girl. He was kept busy with his hostess, parrying certain home questions of hers and trying to get a direct answer to carefully put queries of his own. This he found difficult until he put one about her husband.

“No, my man ain’t listed—the same as most,” she said. “He makes himself of use to the general, scouting and such-like. We know General Johnston well—God bless his face! Any of your boys ever see him?” looking round at them.

“Not so,” John answered for the rest. “We’ve mostly served in Virginny. When will your good man be back, ma’am? I would like to have a word with him.”

“That no soul can tell,” she replied. “He’s with the general now, somewhere, as he is most always

these times.—Jean, my daughter, more hominy cakes. Quick, gell.”

The familiar name made John start, and he looked at the girl with interest, tender thoughts of home in his heart. The sound of a hoarse chuckle roused him from his reverie, and he beheld Bob Spenniker coughing violently.

“Hominy’s too much for me,” the little man said, as John looked up. “I put in more than the machine would hold, and nearly bust.”

He finished with a peculiar chuckle, and looked out of the window. John, following his eyes, saw a body of horsemen in the distance. There was still time to get away. John looked round at his men, rose slowly—they doing the same—and went to the window.

“Who is coming there?” he said to the woman. “Do you know?”

He noticed that she was eyeing him with great sharpness, and Bob’s suspicion struck him forcibly.

“Ay. It’s the man you want to see—General Joseph Johnston and his staff. I know, for my husband is with them.”

The men drew long breaths, but John did not stir.

“We are in luck, then,” was all he said. “Boys, we must move out, for I guess the general is coming here.—What do I owe you, ma’am?”

He took out his purse so leisurely that Bob Spenniker could have knocked him down. Every moment of delay made escape more difficult. It was nigh impossible now.

"I tell you I take naught," the woman said. "If you are friends, you are welcome to all. If enemies," she paused an instant and looked maliciously at Bob, "I'll be paid later on."

John laughed so naturally that his men stared.

"We have to thank you, then, for a rare good breakfast, and for something better still. General Johnston is the man I most want to see.—Come, boys, smartly."

He strode out with steady step, not quickening it in the least, even outside. As the men prepared to mount, he said, in a low voice:

"I am going to interview the general. You must stay still and keep together. If we have to bolt, strike southwest. I do not think it need come to that. Remember, if any officer speaks to you, we are from Hardee's army. Don't say a word more than you can help."

"Right," answered Bob for the rest. "But you've clean gone out of your reckoning. We'll be corralled, sure."

"Why?"

"She'll do it," pointing with his thumb at the farm. "She looks us right through. She'll tell them all she knows."

"We must chance that. Ride forward now to meet the staff. Halt when I give the word. March!"

"Well, I'm darned," muttered Bob to himself, half aloud. "He's going to face a reb general, bold as a skunk. I'd rather be shot first. Yet I bet I'd——"

"Silence!" said John sharply; "keep your thoughts to yourself. Here they come."

An officer of the staff galloped up. John saluted.

"Who are you?"

"Scouts—from General Hardee."

"Hand me your papers."

"I have none."

"How's that?"

"We were sent to reconnoitre Sherman's army, and that we've done; but last night we ran too near one of his outposts, and had to get clear the best way we could. We lost our bearings, and stopped at this farm to inquire."

"You must report to General Johnston at once."

He wheeled, and they rode together into the general's presence. So far all seemed safe. The officer suspected nothing, though the request for papers had taken John desperately by surprise, and he had not much confidence in the adopted Southern drawl he now endeavoured to put into his voice, taken from a Southern man he once knew in Wisconsin.

General Johnston was a small man, very upright, with closely cut beard and mustache turning gray. He had a keen, kindly face, and an impressive dignity of manner. But he looked, John thought, like a man worn out with ill-health and mental worry. The uniforms of his officers were threadbare and weather-stained, and not a horse was in decent condition; all were gaunt and overworked.

"You are with Hardee," the general said. "What are you doing so far from your lines?"

"Reconnoitring, General. We have been around

two of Sherman's armies, and I was starting right back when I heard you were in the neighbourhood, and ventured to report to you first."

"Quite right. Your news?"

"Sherman 'pears to carry all before him, General."

"What supplies has he?"

"As far as we could make out, a very large train, well guarded. We found no weak places, though we looked well."

Johnston received this with some impatience.

"You have no good news. Yet we are holding him at New Hope crossing."

"By your leave, General, McPherson is getting back from Dallas, and Schofield is closing from the left. We will not hold them long."

The general turned in his saddle, with a jerk of the head.

"Polly, you hear that? It had better be done then and at once."

The officer bowed.

"No other course seems possible, General. Hardee must know."

The general turned to John.

"Do you return direct to your commander?"

"Direct, General."

"I have important intelligence for him, which I will send by an officer of my staff under your escort. Wait with your men while I write a letter."

John saluted and rode back, swiftly making plans.

"The ball is rolling in our favour now," he said to his men. "We are to escort an officer of John-

ston's staff with despatches to Hardee. This was what I wanted—more than I dreamed of. That letter may be worth everything to us, and must be taken with the bearer, when the time comes. Ride behind and keep your eyes on me. When I lay my hand on his shoulder, close round, and cover him. If we are chased——”

“Just what we shall be,” interrupted Bob Spenniker. “That farm was a trap. See!”

The staff had halted some distance from the house, but some one was waving a handkerchief, and while Bob spoke, a horseman left the group of officers and rode to the gate.

“There!” cried Bob, with triumph in his tone. “I told you how it would be. We have one chance, and only one—scoot and let the despatch go. Who says the same? There's no time for ceremony.”

The men glanced at John. For an instant he did not speak; then, striking his horse with the spur and bringing him so close to Spenniker's that they almost touched one another, he drew a revolver.

“You are right. No ceremony. One step and you are a dead man—and so are those who follow you!”

Bob's face changed, a smile broke over it, broadening to a grin, and then he swore from pure delight.

“Thunder! I've fetched it out,” he said in a loud whisper. “I did not think he could rar' so, and as a last stake I tried rushing. Put that thing away, Captain. I never ran from a rebel yet, and I won't begin now, except at your word. You can command me, and I will obey every time.”

There was the sound of a galloping horse, and an officer rode up. John had no time to reply. This officer was a young man with a fresh-coloured face, smooth shaven, only redeemed from actual effeminacy and boyishness by a pair of honest penetrating gray eyes. He nodded good-humouredly all round as he rode up.

“How are you, boys?” Then to John: “I have the letter right enough. Let us be off as fast as we can tear. My name’s Ralph Cunnington, lieutenant. What is yours, Courier?”

He spoke to John, who was the only one who had the presence of mind to salute him.

“Do you know the way?” the lieutenant went on.

“Yes, Lieutenant.”

“Then let us make tracks at the lope.”

The escort was nothing loath. A glance behind them showed the man from the farm galloping back to the staff at full speed. A detachment would be sent in pursuit.

“Ride, boys,” John said, in a tone that made the subaltern stare and frown—“ride all you know!”

CHAPTER XXI.

THE course John took was not the shortest route to Sherman's lines. It was necessary to keep in a southerly direction until out of reach of the enemy, or the suspicions of the lieutenant would at once be aroused. Equally important was it to make for the open country, where the superior speed and condition of their horses could have full play. John had not bred horses for five years for nothing. In spite of the night ride, his animals were still fresh and in far better condition than those of the Confederates. A few miles of hard riding and escape would be easy. Meanwhile, if they were pursued, what was to be done with Lieutenant Ralph Cunningham?

John rode at his right, Bob Spenniker on the left, and the men behind. All went well for a few minutes, the pace made by the lieutenant being hard enough to satisfy even his escort. He was mounted on a thoroughbred mare. Then came a shout and a pistol shot from behind to attract the lieutenant's attention. At the same moment his mare plunged forward violently, defying all efforts to control her, and bolted at a pace Bob Spenniker and John, who had the best mounts, could scarcely keep up with.

The circumstance astounded the lieutenant, who was unaware that Bob Spenniker had pricked her in the flanks with a knife.

By the time she was in order a clump of trees lay between them and the farm.

"The best-blooded beast I've ever seen, sir," John remarked, as the officer was about to speak. I would much like to know her pedigree."

Cunnington's face, which had been puzzled and anxious, lit up at once with enthusiasm.

"Messenger was her sire; her mother was bred on our plantation. There are not many to beat her. What was that firing behind us?"

"Union scout, sir, may be," John answered. "They are audacious enough for anything these times—Sherman's men," adding quickly: "Messenger? He was the best horse ever seen this side of the Atlantic."

"You may well say that. Ever seen him?"

"No, but I have been told a heap. Could ye give me his points, Lieutenant? I love a rarely good horse. This one ain't bad, though he don't begin to compare with your mare. What do you think of him?"

"A good beast," was the answer—"a very good beast; bony and well knitted up, steps out freely and in good fix. Where and how do you manage to keep him in such condition? Johnston himself can not get corn enough round here."

John grinned.

"We struck the horses near the Union lines and made a trade. That pays sometimes."

The lieutenant laughed, and then, replying to a second request, launched into a learned disquisition upon the points of Messenger, the great English thoroughbred sire in that day to some of the best horses in America. John began to breathe again now. They had distanced their pursuers, and were almost out of danger. The next thing was to change the course toward the Union lines, and John, still talking horse-flesh, began gradually to rein in a northerly direction. But they had not gone far when Cunningham called a halt.

"How's this, Courier?" he said to John, looking round him. "I thought you knew the way. The turn you have taken will run us into Sherman's rear. You had better let me guide you. I happen to know this country pretty well. We must strike south."

John looked slowly round and turned his head as if puzzled. The officer was still unsuspecting, and it was most desirable to keep him so, in case they ran into another body of the enemy, but they could not afford to lose time. The arrest must come now. He raised his hand, and the men were fingering their revolvers, when Bob, who was scanning every grass blade and twig within sight, said in his driest tone:

"We have run upon friends when least expecting 'em. Look ahead."

John dropped his hand hastily and did so. Half hidden behind a tree a hundred yards away was a face and a pair of hands levelling a rifle at Lieutenant Cunningham. The rest of the man was carefully concealed, and so motionless was he that only the eyes of a frontiersman could have seen him.

John spurred his horse and placed himself in front of the lieutenant.

"Don't waste the bullet, friend, and lose your life," he called out. "You cannot shoot ten. We are from General Johnston. What are you?"

The man looked at him a moment as if rather inclined to let his rifle answer, then came from behind the tree. He had a face as gaunt and brown as an Indian's, with unkempt hair and beard, and was dressed in greasy leather with a gaudy neckerchief and cowhide shoes.

"I am keepin' an eye for youths—Texans, outpost of Hood's division, Hardee's army. If my trigger pulled easier," he added with a grin, "you'd be in hell, young man. But I saw his uniform," with a jerk of the thumb at the direction of the lieutenant, "and so I held on."

"How many of you?" said John, forgetting that it was not his place to ask questions.

"Twenty," was the cheering reply.

The lieutenant now rode forward. "I have despatches for your general," he said in an authoritative tone. "Take me to him, will you?"

The man laughed jeeringly. That a youthful subaltern of another regiment should think that he could command a Texan of Hood's was amusing to the last degree.

"Take yourself, my sonny," he said with a sneer. "Our work lays here."

Cunnington's face flushed; his quick Southern temper rose in an instant.

"Damn your impudence!" he flashed out; "I will

report you for insubordination. Where's your officer?"

"You will—what?" growled the Texan, slipping his rifle into his arm-pit and cocking it. But John, who had drawn a revolver to be prepared for emergencies, covered him, Bob Spenniker following suit.

"Obey orders, friend," John said quietly. "We are in a hurry."

The man glared at the weapons and at the faces behind them, and then without speaking threw his rifle over his shoulder and strode away, the horsemen following.

"By George, Courier," the lieutenant said, laughing, "you are not half so gentle as you look. I would rather be behind your fire than face it. That is often so, though, with very quiet men. Thanks."

The subaltern in charge of the outpost turned out to be a friend of Cunningham's and offered to add half his force to the escort, saying that Hardee's headquarters was ten miles off, and that the road was dangerous, as they were near the Yankee lines. John listened with painful intentness for Cunningham's reply.

"I will take ten," he said, adding privately to John: "After our little experience I prefer that you and your boys should not be outnumbered by these Texans; yet they would be useful if we were let in for a brush with the blue-noses."

The outpost were eating a hasty meal at this time, in which John's men were invited to join. They did so, and with remarkably good appetites, considering that if the halt lasted too long members of Johnston's

staff might overtake them, and that in any event they had a desperate struggle before them. But it is a soldier's maxim to eat whenever he has food before him. John alone found it difficult, and was deeply thankful when the order to mount was given. He managed to get a moment alone with Bob Spenniker.

"We must strike as soon as we are well away from this crowd. A man must cover each Texan. I will take the lieutenant. We are not far from our lines, as you heard them say. Take no prisoners except Cunningham. Tie up the rest, and bring along the horses that don't stampede. It was well you had your eyes. We should all have been lost else."

A faint wink quivered on Bob's eyelid.

"Texans, boss, is hell!" he said solemnly. "But we will get away with that letter."

They started, riding in silence. There was no more talk now of blooded mares and thoroughbreds; the only sound as they rode was the ceaseless drip of the rain and the splash of the hoofs through the mud. They were in the midst of forest land again, and a thick mist was rising from the steaming, spongy ground. The prospect was depressing in the extreme to the Union men, and their courage began to drag and falter. They cursed the day they had volunteered for such an expedition; they cursed John for getting them into such a hole. They felt no confidence in themselves, and John's qualities as a fighter they knew nothing about. Texans had terrible reputations for quick shooting and handiness with knives, and these were powerful men, hard-faced and supple-jointed. John was unconscious of his men's condi-

tion. He had not been a leader long enough to know how much difference there is in men at different times. He supposed that they would be animated with his own sense of the vital importance of securing Johnston's despatch, as Bob Spenniker appeared to be. John's difficulty with himself was to curb his impatience long enough. He longed for the struggle and had no fears of its results at all. He hardly expected a shot to be fired.

Five minutes passed—ten. They were beyond sight and hearing of the outpost. At any time another might be met with. John raised himself in his stirrups, looked at Bob, and laid his hand on Lieutenant Cunningham's shoulder, upon which every Union man cocked his rifle and called upon the Texan nearest to him to surrender. John caught the lieutenant firmly by the collar.

"Dismount, sir."

"What?"

"We are Union soldiers. Give me that despatch."

"I'll see you——"

The oath was lost in the struggle that followed. Gallantly the lieutenant grappled with his enemy; but John's grip held, though when Bob, who was not troubled with scruples, would have shot Cunningham to save trouble, John turned the revolver aside and saved his life. They were off their horses now, struggling on the ground. Putting forth all his strength, John held Cunningham down while Bob, with professional adroitness, picked his pocket of the precious

letter and thrust it into John's breast. As he did so he whispered:

"Get to your horse and scoot! Never mind him or any one. The boys are overmatched."

John sprang up and looked round, when what seemed a stunning blow on the back of the head threw him violently forward. He fell on his face, and, but for the concentration of his mind upon the letter, must have been utterly stupefied. But he contrived to raise himself to his knees and found his horse standing over him. He set his teeth and made a supreme effort and crawled into the saddle. Then a deadly faintness overpowered him, and he was conscious of nothing more until he found himself slowly riding through the trees alone. His horse was proceeding at a gentle pace, as if conscious of the condition of his master. Yet he moved his head wearily from side to side, for from behind, growing louder every moment, came the sound of horsemen in pursuit. The Union men had been beaten. Excellent soldiers on the field of battle, they were not a match for these Texans in a hand-to-hand fight. As one of them said afterward to a man he made prisoner, "You'd have had a kind of show, Yank, if ye'd shot us first and tied us afterward."

The presented arms of the soldiers made the Texans laugh, for with the quickness of cats they dodged aside, only two slightly wounded. Then came their turn, and four Union men fell dead in as many seconds. The rest closed in bravely, but were overpowered, Bob Spenniker alone making his escape. This little scrimmage and its results put the Texans

in such good humour that the excitement of Lieutenant Cunningham, as he threw himself on a horse and called upon them to pursue John, caused a burst of laughter, and not a man stirred. The lieutenant was so incoherent in his rage and anxiety that it was some moments before he could make himself understood. But when at last he did so the men responded with a yell.

“This way!” one shouted; “we’ll be on the boy in two shakes. I saw him crawlin’ off with his head hanging over the saddle-horn. We’ll get that letter, Lieutenant, if we have to ride through Sherman’s lines.”

CHAPTER XXII.

A BULLET had grazed John's skull and cut a deep and ugly scalp wound, which had begun to bleed freely. This, though it had given him consciousness and now enabled him to encourage his horse to put forth all its speed, brought a new danger with it—a weakness that rapidly increased. He fought against the faintness with all the stubbornness that was in him. He knew by the course his horse was taking that he was making straight for the lines; he knew the power and courage of the animal, and felt that if this faintness could be kept at bay the precious letter could be safely delivered into Sherman's hands.

Whiz!—a bullet tore over his shoulder, cutting through the cloth of his cape. The enemy were within range and had seen him. John stroked his horse's neck and whispered to it. He had not strength for whip or spur, or the heart to use them, and they were not needed, for the good beast, frightened by the noise of the bullet, made a plunge that nearly unseated the rider, and then broke into a furious gallop. The next shot went wide, and then the firing ceased. But giddiness again began to overpower John in spite of all his efforts, and he could neither see nor feel—only by some blind instinct cling to his flying horse. He

wondered vaguely whether this meant death. "But it shall not," he muttered, "till I have brought in that letter." For two miles he rode on, the Texans following in grim silence, drawing nearer and nearer as John grew weaker. The end was very near. John's head dropped lower and lower, the reins slipped from his hand; he clung to the horse's mane and swayed to and fro like a drunken man. The grip of his knees began slowly to relax. Suddenly his horse pulled up, throwing both feet out stiffly and coming to an instant halt, with arched neck and quivering ears. A man stood in the path with presented rifle; behind him, a score more, mounted—a country patrol.

"Who goes there?"

The answer was the dull thud of a falling body, a yell of disappointment from the Texans, and John lay as one dead at Sergeant Hornber's feet!

.
"What is it, then?"

General Sherman spoke in an impatient tone, being engaged in calculations which had been interrupted five times in as many minutes.

"Courier returned, General. Lieutenant Snelling sent me to report."

"Which courier?"

"John Burletson."

Sherman put down his pen.

"Why does not the man come himself?"

"He is dead, General."

Sherman leisurely folded up his papers.

"Where is the body?"

"Lieutenant Snelling's tent."

"I will go to him."

A crowd of men, mostly couriers, were collected about the tent, discussing in cool and cheerful tones the size and shape of the wound in John's head.

"Wonderful how he could have lived so long," Sherman heard one man say. "He must have wanted to get here powerful bad. Pity the news he came with was not written down. He's a gone coon—sure."

Then they drew back to let the general pass. Within the tent were the lieutenant, Sergeant Hornber, and the surgeon to the staff, who was feeling John's pulse.

"Strange case," said the doctor, looking up at Sherman. "The man's alive. His brain is nearly exposed, and he has lost pints. He must have ridden for miles to get himself into such a state. We found blood in his boots."

"Has he spoken?"

"No, General. But I will bring him to consciousness if there is enough vitality left for my stuff to act. I guess you had better remain here if you are expecting news of importance. He may last a minute or two after he revives; he won't go much further. Ah! look out; he's coming round. Stand where he can see you."

John's eyelids quivered; he sighed twice and then looked feebly round. As he caught sight of Sherman's face his expression became concentrated and full of intelligence and his lips moved. Sherman bent his head until their faces almost touched.

“Speak up,” he said gently, in a matter-of-fact tone. “Remember, I am a little deaf.”

But John did not try to speak. Looking at Sherman with eyes full of meaning, he lifted his arms feebly, and placed the nerveless fingers on his left side.

“The pocket!” cried the doctor. “Something in his pocket.”

They undid the coat, and Sherman drew out General Johnston’s letter. At sight of the handwriting, he tore it open and read swiftly. John watched him eagerly. He saw the stern eyes brighten and the broad chest heave with a great sigh of relief. Then he lost consciousness once more, and even the doctor thought this time that he was dead.

“Greeley,” Sherman said to the doctor, who was looking at the letter with curious eyes, “this man deserves the thanks of the army. If he lives he shall know it. *Nothing* now must stand in the way of his recovery. I know you will spare no pains—you never do—but drop all other work, if necessary, and stay by him. I would rather lose a company than such a life as his.”

Sherman spoke huskily, and with deep feeling. He had good reason. The letter now in his possession was a notification from Johnston to Hardee that the fortified position on the railway from Kingston to Marietta had been secretly abandoned. With such intelligence to hand, all anxiety in Sherman’s mind concerning his own position was over. This letter meant that a general retreat southward on the part of the Confederates was in progress, and his own bold

march to Dallas justified. In a few days the army would be within reach of all its supplies and be advanced far into the enemy's country. These hopes were realized. In six days the railway as far as Big Shanty, north of Marietta, was in Union hands. New Hope crossing was carried, and by the 1st of June Sherman was able to report to Washington that he was in a strong position and in full command of supplies, and had marched one hundred miles into Georgia, through a densely wooded country, against a vigilant and stubborn foe.

John lay between life and death for a week. His condition was a subject of interest to numbers of men who had never seen his face. Bob Spenniker, who had reached camp an hour after the leader, with a wounded leg, gave every one he knew a highly coloured account of the whole expedition, and the news spread from regiment to regiment that this courier, a recruit at that, had interviewed General Johnston, and brought to Sherman despatches of enormous importance. As confirmation of this, the report came that "Uncle Billy" sent every day to inquire after the wounded man. The chief speculation of interest soon became, what reward the courier would receive if he lived. It would be promotion of some kind; that much was certain. Equally certain was it, Sherman being commander, that if the man did his duty his future was assured. But would he live? Nobody who was able to obtain reliable information thought so, for it was given out on the best authority that Surgeon Comfort Greeley had guaranteed that he would not die.

Dr. Greeley, or "Candy Gree," as he was called, in compliment to the extreme acerbity of his tongue and temper, was a very positive individual. Such a man either becomes a prophet to his generation or the reverse. Greeley, to put it mildly, was not a prophet. This did not mean that his patients usually died. Very many recovered, for he knew his business well. But, as he expressed it, they were the wrong ones—the people he said would die; while others, about whom he had waxed vehemently hopeful, immediately saw fit to contract some unexpected complication and become defunct, as if to spite him. Yet he never learned discretion, but continued to prophesy as positively as ever to a derisive world. John's case interested him. He was not easily touched, but the determination that this man must have shown impressed Greeley as much as it had done Sherman. He nursed and tended John with more than his usual skill, and with the tenderness of a woman. Never in any campaign was a harder fight made against death. It was an interesting sight to see the general and his surgeon—both grim men, inured to bloodshed, daily braving death themselves and holding human life at its cheapest rate, as all soldiers must at such a time—anxiously watching by the bedside of a private soldier, a unit in the hundred thousand that one of them commanded, and a stranger to them both.

"He *must* be pulled through," Sherman said once impatiently, when John looked worse than usual. "I can't afford to lose this kind of man. Will you do it, Gree?"

"I said so," was the sharp reply. "Don't I know my trade? I tell you he *shall* live."

Sherman sighed.

"Chances are dead against him. I can see that."

"D—n the chances! But I don't admit it."

"What is in his favour?"

"Youth, health, constitution of a bull; temperament of—of an Abraham Lincoln. Chances, General! Pshaw! I know he has a wound that would kill two men—I say I know that. I know he did the worst thing he could for your sake, and rode miles bleeding like a hog, and that all this last week I have had fever to reduce, with hardly an ounce of blood in him to spare. But what of it? He's alive; weak—yes, that's the point, but his temperature normal and pulse not so bad. Wait now; watch, wait and see."

Twenty-four hours passed, and not only did Sherman, Hornber, and Spenniker, the men personally interested in John, watch anxiously to see what changes time would bring, but half of the men in Spenniker's regiment watched too, having bets with Bob on the result. The deadly prostration after the fever and loss of blood showed signs of giving way. The next day John took liquid nourishment freely, and the corner was turned. Great was the joy and congratulation of John's friends, and great was the degradation among Bob Spenniker's comrades. That astute gentleman, the moment the patient showed signs of recovery, had taken up every bet laid against his life, and now stood to win a fabulous amount, unless his debtors were knocked over themselves before they had a chance of paying up, a fate which, Bob

afterward complained, overtook most of them. Two weeks later John was sitting up in bed propped by pillows, reading a letter from home, when General Sherman, who had been too busy to see him lately, came in unexpectedly.

"Tiring your brain, aren't you?" he said kindly, bringing with him an atmosphere of power and life which John found very invigorating. "What does doctor say? Drop that, now," as John saluted. "Let ceremony alone until you are on your feet again. What are those? Home letters?"

"Yes, General."

"Then I must take back what I said. They will do you good. That from your wife?"

John flushed, for he was very weak. It was a letter from Jean. Sherman saw he had made a mistake.

"Whoever it is, send her a bright answer back. You will be fit for service before a month is gone—and promotion."

John caught his breath.

"General—what does that mean? I have done nothing deserving such a thing."

"We think differently," was the answer. "I do, anyhow. It is in my power to give a man a commission if he is clearly worth it."

"A commission—for me—from you!" John gasped. He was still very weak. "I can't believe it."

His voice was strained and trembled in his excitement. Dr. Greeley, who had just entered, shook his head at Sherman.

"Don't, then," the general said, good-humouredly. "I only talked to cheer you. It appears I made a mistake," looking at Greeley. "Never mind. Good news never turned up a man's toes yet."

"Nervous excitement has, often," snapped the doctor.

"Then I will go. Take care of yourself, Burletson, and get well." He rose abruptly, and was leaving the tent when Greeley, who was watching John's face, stopped him.

"One minute, General," he whispered. "He has something on his mind to say to you." Sherman paused good-naturedly and waited, while John took up the letter he had been reading and played with it nervously.

"Say it out, man," the general said with a smile. "What is there to tell me?"

"I've a favour to ask, General."

"Well?"

"You have hinted at rewarding my small service."

"We don't reward small services in this army. Well?"

"I joined, General, as a kind of volunteer."

"So did I."

"A letter came with me from the President. I think he told you my object."

"You mean that crazy notion, that preposterous idea of going to Santanelle?"

"Yes, General."

"But when you volunteered for this expedition I thought that had been knocked out of you."

John smiled faintly and caressed his letter.

“It has been knocked in to-day. I want to know, General——”

“What?”. The question came like a pistol shot, sharp and threatening.

“Whether I may go there, right away, when I am on my feet.”

“I should not offer promotion to a suicide!”

“I meant instead of that.” John’s voice was low but very firm. The general looked at him with a frown; then turned on his heel, saying, in a biting tone:

“It is well I know your mind, for it will save me trouble. A man who can deliberately fool away his life is not fit to command others. But I will wait until you are stronger and have your nerves and senses back again.”

CHAPTER XXIII.

DR. GREELEY was a short-tempered man. The infirmity was constitutional, aggravated by a disappointed life, and when we made his acquaintance it had become chronic and ineradicable. Yet he had another side to his nature, and was so kind to his favourite patients that, though he made numberless enemies, he was never without a friend. John had found this. His very quiet disposition had drawn out all that was best in Greeley, and until the general's visit there had not been a difference between them. The immediate consequence of Sherman's call was an increase of gentleness on Greeley's part toward John. The patient's nerves were so much overwrought by the interview that it was only by great care and skill that Greeley prevented fever from supervening; and very rude indeed were the remarks he made to the general's orderly, who was sent to inquire.

"Tell General Sherman that my man has been on the tear ever since he was here. I had no sleep with him last night, and don't expect to get much to-night. It's all his fault, and if the man dies, which is now more than likely, I shall hold him responsible. Tell him this, word for word. If it scares you, I will

write it down. He may know something about leading an army, but he knows less than nothing about talking to a man wounded in the head."

When John was well enough, however, his turn arrived, and he became the astonished recipient of the choicest epithets in Dr. Greeley's vocabulary. Greeley had been an interested listener to the conversation which had done the mischief, and had heard from Hornber something of John's intention when he joined the army. He liked John, and considered it to be his duty to tell him what his obstinacy would lead to if he persevered in his plan of going to Santanella. The attack began as soon as the patient was really out of all danger of relapse, and lasted until his wound was healed and his strength had returned to him. John said little in his defence, and the doctor boasted in private to Hornber that he was convincing "this misguided idiot that his mad coon-hunt must be given up." Some of the arguments, John had to confess, cut him to the quick.

"I will take it another way," Greeley said one evening as they sat smoking, Hornber with them, aiding and abetting Candy Gree with might and main. "You are hard upon your mother—shamefully so. To leave her for such a thing as this is the worst kind of selfishness. Bad enough to go away to fight your country's battles, though that is right and natural. If every man who had a mother stayed at home, there would be no army at all. That stands to reason. But to desert her in her feeble old age to fly off on such cracked, senseless wee-gee as this! I tell you, any man who could do it after he knows what you

know now, is a criminal, and I am not the least too tender-mouthed to say so to his face. If the risk were reasonable, and the life to be saved your brother's, or some man who had gone through fire to save you, I would say little. But this man is not that kind, and the risk to you is out of all reason and sense. Do you think the rebs don't guard their prisons? You have sixty miles to ride to Santanelle from this camp, and sixty miles to get back again; and if you are found out, and he is caught, what then? Shooting; quick, cold-blooded gun-work. I know, for I have had scores under me that have been in Southern prisons. They love there to knock a Yank on the head—it means one less to find food for. If the thing had ever been done, I would try and forgive you; but it has been tried and always failed. If you try now you are past swearing at. I am not at all sure that it ain't my duty to certify you as unfit to be at large, and see that you are arrested the day you leave me. —What say you, Hornber?"

"Me!" cried the sergeant, with a snort. "There's more in my pipe than yours, Doc. Why do you harp on the risk? As well tell a moth that fire burns. John loves danger. Listen to what Bobby Spenniker tells of how, instead of saving his skin by a scoot, he bluffed up cool as an ice-house to General Joe Johnston and his staff and took in the whole outfit with his innocent face. I would not waste two breaths on the question of risk, talking to John. Not but what you speak God's own truth. What I say is, can any man with a head—and we all give him credit for having that—deliberately tread under his feet

what Sherman has for him? Talk about flying in the face of Providence! Never had any man since the war began so good a chance of sailing in and capturing all that is good in the army; while, if he lets the chance go by, and goes and does what Sherman disapproves of, he'll miss it all and ruin himself. You talk of his mother. I'll add this: From what he has told me about the old lady she just lives in the hope of his success. Aye, John, twist it and turn it how ye may, if you fail here you rob your mother of her rights. She has helped, as mothers do, to make you what you are. To forego what is offered you, will be rankest unfilialness, to my thinking. If the love of your mother really holds your heart, you'll never do it. There, I have said my say."

Both looked at John and waited for his answer. This was his last day in hospital. To-morrow he would be a free agent. Earlier in the day he had said he was going to the general next morning, so they had fired their last guns, for they knew, what John did not, that after his great service he would be refused nothing that he might reasonably ask.

"What will it be?" the doctor asked.

John puffed a long ring of smoke from a cigar an officer in the cavalry had sent him, and looked at it thoughtfully.

"I have listened carefully, good friends, to all you say, and but for the mail that has come to me from home I do not know, torn about as my own mind has been since I have been here, that I could have stood against you on that ground. There is truth bitter and strong in much you have set down. But as

things are, I cannot, I will not, go back upon my word. The chance of success is small, I know. I never thought it was big. But there is no other way, and if that boy is not pulled out of that hole he will certainly die. So much I heard a few days back. No—I must go, and without delay. I shall ask you, Sergeant, to trace out with me a map of roads as far as we can get them on the way to Santanelle.”

“What next?” grumbled Hornber. “Perhaps you will ask me to go too. I will not help you.”

“Yes, you will,” John answered gently, “when you see that I mean going. You are the only one who knows enough to do it.”

“Good Lord!—the man’s mad!” Dr. Greeley exclaimed. “Ah—we are going to have a visitor. George!” as Hornber sprang smartly to attention. “It is the general himself!”

“Well, Doctor,” Sherman said, taking the camp-table as a seat, and lighting a pipe, “have you brought the fellow to reason as you promised me?”

“That seems impossible. I have done my best.”

“Obstinate still? What is to be done with him?”

“He should be arrested as a mischievous lunatic,” Greeley answered savagely. “Tied up and sent home in a cage. He has less sense than any man I ever met, and that is saying something.”

“What say you, Burletson?”

“I would ask your permission, General, to make a start for Santanelle in two days.”

The doctor exploded.

“If you do, I’m d—d! That’s all.”

“In three, then.”

"It will be a week, seven whole days and nights, and that is a month too soon, before you'll be allowed to go anywhere, except for exercise."

"Well, then, a week," John said, with a sigh, "if I must wait so long."

"You are a fool, Burletson, you know, and worse," Sherman remarked severely.

"So I have been told by both these friends, General."

"Don't call me a friend," growled Greeley. "I have no use for men like you."

Sherman looked amused.

"What plans have you?"

"Have I your leave to go?"

"I cannot prevent you. The instructions I received from the President are too clear to be set aside. If they were not, it might be different."

"I have strong reasons, General."

"They must be strong. Well—you are going? Tell me your plans, I say."

"I shall disguise myself. I have thought it out, and believe my best chance is to borrow the uniform of a rebel subaltern. I know where I can get one."

"You are ambitious."

"It is risky, but I reckon worth it. The man who is going with me, if he can get his colonel's permission, will act as my servant."

"Only one man?"

"I should have gone alone, but he wished so much to go!"

"Who?"

"Bob Spenniker."

"The little rat! None better. Well?"

"We will ride straight to Santanelle town, and gather information there about the prison. I shall pay a friendly call on the commandant, and perhaps get a look at the prisoners. What we do after that will depend upon circumstances."

"When do you expect to get back?"

"In two weeks. It is sixty miles by road to Santanelle. We shall do that in three days. The return journey may take longer, and there are sure to be delays and many difficulties at the place."

"I give you less time than that, if you get away at all. Remember, the chances of their seeing through your disguise if you go as an officer are ten times as great as they were before. We will talk about this later. I have a map that may be of use. We will do what we can for you. The cavalry shall be on the lookout and meet you if necessary. Come and see me in your rig. I lived down South some years, and I may be able to give you some hints in deportment and behaviour. Everything will depend on that. I like your ideas on the whole, but you will be like a man standing on a powder magazine with a lighted match in his hand."

Two days later, when John appeared before the general fully equipped, Sherman laughed heartily.

"I should not have known you," he said. "But there is room for improvement. You must not hold your sword that way, to begin with. They would see at once there was something wrong. Now let me hear you speak. Ah, that will not do at all." And he then proceeded to give John a lesson in accent,

deportment, and manner, which he repeated until all that he had to teach was well and thoroughly learned.

It was a characteristic action—one of those which endeared Sherman to all his men, though he was a strong disciplinarian.

John set out on his quest at the end of June. He rode the horse whose speed and sagacity had already saved his life once. Bob was equally well mounted. The men cheered John as he rode off. He could have had forty volunteers to accompany him, if he had needed them, for this new and original way of “dirking the rebs” made a great impression on the bolder spirits. But Bob was worth them all. He had been bred in the slums of Chicago, and had completed his education in the mining camps and ranches of the Rocky Mountains and Texas. There were few things of wild and lawless kinds that “the rat” had not taken part in; he was the best shot and the best rider of his regiment, and, alas! the heaviest gambler. Why he had taken so strong a fancy to John no one could understand. It was a curious case of attraction of opposites. In John’s presence, Bob’s language was comparatively decent; and though publicly he affected to look upon his leader as an amiable lunatic, it was not worth any one’s while to make a disparaging remark about John in Bob’s hearing. John, on his side, trusted Bob implicitly, and made no secret of the opinion that if he were successful it would probably be more owing to Bob than to any action of his own. Bob’s keenness and quickness had inspired John with a profound respect for the little man.

They rode steadily all day, keeping a sharp look-

out for troops, but meeting none, except a patrol or two, which, thanks to Bob's sight and hearing, they easily avoided. At night they halted in a small village, and John for the first time tried the effect of his disguise. He was well satisfied with the result, and they found no difficulty in getting all they needed. Now and then they lost their way, but Bob's woodcraft and ingenuity proved equal to all emergencies, and they reached Santanelle by the evening of the third day. Before the war, Santanelle had contained one thousand inhabitants. Now there were but a hundred males, not one of whom was young and able-bodied. Most of the work was done by the women, and the place had a depressed, poverty-stricken appearance. There was one hotel, in which place they took up their quarters, intending to begin the campaign the next day. Bob, however, began that night, by making friends with the landlord, and playing euchre with him until the small hours of the morning. In this way he not only increased his stock of ready money, for the Southerner was no match at cards for the Western man, but gained much valuable information about the prison and its commandant.

CHAPTER XXIV.

BOB SPENNIKER was an excellent listener and possessed the art of turning a confiding person inside out without that person suspecting his design, but he was not good at reporting what he heard.

"You will have to bluff it, boss, same as you did Joe Johnston, only harder," was his reply to John's question concerning the prison. "The prisoners is shot like skunks if they put half an inch of nose outside the dead line—so you see how it is."

And this was all Bob would say for a time. By dint of many questions, however, John at last learned that Santanelle was an offshoot of the great prison at Andersonville, and contained about three hundred prisoners, guarded by thirty men, under command of a Lieutenant Catford. The post of prison guard was much hated by the Confederate soldiers; desertion was common; and even Lieutenant Catford, the landlord said, was sick of his billet, and pining to be at the front. This, the most important part of the evidence, Bob only mentioned as an afterthought. What had impressed him was the landlord's emphatic assertion that no one was allowed to go over the prison, because infectious diseases were too prevalent there. Bob was rough, hard in the grain and hardily reared;

but certain disclosures of the landlord had changed his attitude toward the enterprise in a remarkable manner. Up to this time the little man had been openly scornful that John should spend money and effort in an attempt to rescue one man. Now, though he said little, that little was significant.

"I see no road clear myself, but don't doubt it will come clear to you. Good luck to the biz. I don't know that I take more pleasure in shooting rebs in a general way than any other whites. But after what I've heard I would like to set some of these brutes wriggling over a red-skin's fire—I would, by the Lord!"

John sent Bob to the stable, to procure for himself the opportunity of quietly thinking out his plan of campaign. Bob retired nothing loath, groomed the horses, and gossiped with the barkeeper until the order came to saddle up. John took the opportunity, remembering something Sherman had told him, to walk into the stable and reprove Bob in vigorous language for some fancied neglect of the horse. He nearly spoilt it all, however, at the end by laughing at the intense astonishment of the little man.

"Your lieutenant can talk, then," the barkeeper said, after John had stalked out, his sabre clanking royally over the loose stones. "I thought by his looks he were an extraordinary mild kind of man."

"You make no mistake," Bob said viciously. "He's the most cussed nigger-driver ever I struck. His father's overseer down in Louisanny don't begin to come near him. I've seen him take a nigger's hide off in strips when he was really riled."

"Don't say?" exclaimed the other. "Then Lieutenant Catford and he will freeze at once."

"That man fond of thrashing niggers?" observed Bob meditatively. "You'd say so if you saw him with the Yanks. They run at the sound of his voice, I'm told. When he first came, they complained of their grub—as if they'd be fed high, blame 'em! when our own boys have not enough! But he stopped that."

"How?"

Bob ducked his head behind one of the horses to hide his face. He did not think its expression was to be trusted.

"Told 'em that if there was not enough food he had plenty of ammunition, and if they spoke again he'd feed 'em with that. This settled it. Since then the cholera thinned 'em down to rights. Good job, too."

Bob repeated this conversation to John, who said nothing, but rode at a quicker pace. They were riding toward the prison.

"Going to interview the lieutenant?" Bob remarked casually, a little offended that John said nothing about his plans.

"Yes. Remember you are a Texan."

"That so? An' you?"

"I'm a subaltern in Hardee's corps, invalided from active service." John pointed to his forehead, carefully enveloped in one of the old bandages which had been preserved for the purpose. "I am calling as I pass—that is all at present. We shall have to see what this man Catford is like before we make more plans."

The prison was on the side of a hill, at the foot of which lay the town of Santanelle. It was a large inclosure or stockade, and above it, on the side of the hill, stood the guard-house. Four sentries were pacing along the four sides of the stockade, and at each angle was a twelve-pounder gun. John saw at a glance that the place was so constructed as to be easily controlled by a mere handful of armed men.

A sentry on duty at the guard-house directed John to a house a hundred yards away as the lieutenant's residence. Here another soldier, who was sitting at his ease on a stump, cutting up a plug of tobacco, carelessly saluted, and after filling his pipe leisurely proceeded to lead the way in. He led through a narrow passage, and, without knocking, thrust his head into the room beyond. A few words passed in whispers in the room, and then the soldier, flattening himself against the wall to leave John room to pass, said, with a nod of encouragement:

"He's in. Move along, Lieutenant."

John moved on with his best Southern swagger, leaving Bob outside to converse with the guard, and found himself in a small room so full of tobacco smoke that the man within it was half hidden as by a fog. Through the smoke were to be seen a pair of bony legs covering the seats of three chairs, and on the fourth the body of a sallow-faced young man who looked as if he was in an advanced stage of consumption. His uniform jacket was minus several important buttons, his boots were unpolished, his trousers unstrapped, his shirt was ragged, while his face and hands were grimy to a degree. On a table at his right

were a bottle of spirits, a tumbler half full of whisky and water, and a pile of yellow-backed novels, one of which he was reading. At John's entrance the lieutenant withdrew his legs from their supporting chairs and extended a cold, limp hand.

"I am happy to make your acquaintance, Lieutenant Burletson."

His voice was as languid as his manner, but his eyes, which seemed to contain in their expression all the vitality the rest of him lacked, said plainly, "And what the deuce do you want with me?"

John bowed and shook hands in silence, considering how he should deal with this man. Bob's first words this morning, "Bluff it, boss," occurred to him. He felt that no half measures would be of the least avail with such a man.

"My visit surprises you, Lieutenant," he said, drawling his words slowly, with as near an approach to a Southern accent as it was in his power to utter. "That is because you do not know my business here. But you will before long. I am to take your place."

John forgot himself a little here, and jerked out the last sentence with true Yankee abruptness; but Catford did not notice it. The significance of the words to him prevented all danger of this. Never did a random blow go home with greater force. In an instant the languor of the man had given way to intense excitement.

"It has come at last, then? Take some whisky. Have something to eat. This is news, indeed. Are you from Richmond?"

"Thanks, I have breakfasted," John answered,

the steadiness of his voice in strong contrast to the other's vehemence. "I am from the front, from Hardee's corps. I was scalped by a bullet wound, and they refused to let me do any more active service for a while and sent me here. You will get authority from Richmond later on. Hardee was writing there when I left. You will take my place in the regiment."

"Which?"

"Thirteenth—Hood's Texans."

Catford, who was helping himself to some more whisky, looked up with a puzzled air, and John felt very cold.

"But I thought those devils would only fight under a Western man."

"Wa-al," John said, smiling, "that is about what they're used to. I am Western bred, as you see; but necessity compels many things. Any man who'll fight will do now."

Lieutenant Catford's face fell a little.

"Infernal queer men to lead, those."

"More fun to be had with them, though," John said dryly, "than guarding prisoned Yanks. But no doubt that will depend on the temperament of the officer. It's more dangerous."

Lieutenant Catford flushed angrily. The whisky had warmed his blood.

"If you suppose I'm scared," he cried, "you don't know who you are speaking to. I am there, if it comes to leading. They shall find out, too, what discipline means, and that I know how it should be maintained."

"Be careful," John drawled; "Texans ain't niggers, you know."

Catford put down his glass with a muttered oath. But John's face was so innocent and withal so firm that he thought better of what he was going to say, and offered cigars instead. John took one, picking it carefully, though in truth he knew little about cigars.

"This life here," he said, "you find quiet, don't you?"

"It is the dulllest there is—after you have been here as long as I have. A man who likes his own company may get along. I do not."

John nodded and then leaned back in his chair and puffed in silence, watching Catford under his eyelids.

"I want quiet—or they believe I do—the Government, I mean—and they think you have had enough."

"They are right, then," Catford responded, with an uneasy laugh. "I would have thanked them to find out that before. Do you know the President?"

He lit a cigar as he spoke, and John noticed that his hand trembled so much that he could hardly hold his match.

"That is a hard question for me to answer," he replied. "Perhaps I won't answer it, if you don't mind."

"Not the least. How were things going when you left the front?"

Catford spoke with a visible effort, and for a short time they chatted about the chances of the war. Then John played his second card.

"I will ask a favour of you, Lieutenant."

"Anything I can do." The tone was cordial even to nervousness.

"I want to take measure of what the command of this prison amounts to. If you have time this morning, will you show me the guard-house, the place where you keep your prisoners, and your means of defence in case of attack or revolt. I do not know, of course, how they may settle things at Richmond; but if they approve my appointment here they will want you at once, and I should like to be prepared."

Lieutenant Catford played with his cigar and frowned. "Who was this man?"

"I fear that is out of my power. Regulations forbid it, unless you can show me written authority from the President."

This was a facer for John. Yet his need was desperate.

"Excuse me, I question that. Show me the order."

The lieutenant did not answer, and John followed up his advantage.

"As commander here you have a right to exercise your discretion. I am aware of that. But I have mentioned the name of my general; and I could give you others." He paused, but still there was no reply. Catford was biting his finger nails in hesitation. John put down his cigar and took up his sword.

"I will wish you good-day, Lieutenant." His manner was frigidly dignified, his voice as severe as he could make it.

Catford did not meet his eye.

"Sit down again; we will talk it over," he said.

John turned on his heel. "I see nothing to talk about, sir. You have made a mistake, but that is your business. Good-morning."

Catford gathered himself together with a dejected air.

"I will do what you ask. After all, you may as well see what a God-forsaken hole this is, and the dogs that live and die in it. My chief reason for putting you off, if you wish to know it, was a fear lest the place should sicken you and my chance of escape be lost."

"No danger of that. My orders are too strict. When shall I come?"

"This afternoon, at three. You'll lunch here?"

But John declined, though with politeness. He wanted fresh air and leisure to think and plan. He had indeed "bluffed it," and his ideas required altogether rearranging. Before this talk his inspection of the prison would have been by the favour of the commandant. Now he saw that he must assume command. Catford feared him for some reason. This must be made the most of. Yet how to work it into practical results?

John found the lieutenant waiting for him when he arrived at the appointed time. Catford looked smarter and more soldierly, having dressed himself with some care. But the same uneasy shiftiness was in his eyes. His men looked discontented, to the point of mutiny. Their guard-house was a poor place; the bedding dirty, the supply of food John found scanty and irregular. If this was the condition of the jailers, he thought, what must be that of

the prisoners? The system of defence was explained by Catford in detail, and from the complacency of his tone it was evident that he felt himself upon safe ground.

“We have been extra-careful lately. There are rumours that Sherman may make a dash for us on the way to Andersonville. If he does, the Yanks here will wish he’d stayed away. I will show you why, presently. As it is, we have had to make several examples, some of the fools thinking we are afraid of their slop-pail army. That is easy. The trouble is keeping the brutes alive. I tried to do something for them when I first took command, but it was no good. Now I am as hard as nails, and would as lief blow them all up to-morrow. As it is, they die off like rotten sheep. Come and see them.”

The stockade was twelve feet high, an impassable wall of timber, within which was a railing spiked at the top, and within the railing which inclosed an acre of ground were the prisoners. The reports Bob had brought and the hints Catford dropped made John brace himself to see anything with calmness, however loathsome or heart-breaking it might be. But when the reality was before him it required all his self-control to prevent an exclamation then and there of grief and rage. It was fortunate that both Catford and his men were too much accustomed to what they saw to watch closely any effect it might have upon a visitor. Catford wished to get the inspection over as soon as possible, walked quickly through the throng of prisoners, who shrank back to let him pass,

and stared vacantly at the man at his heel in Confederate uniform.

Three hundred men, houseless and shelterless, huddled together like cattle in stock-yards on the bare patch of ground. That was what John saw. They were without bedding, and were destitute of decent clothing. All day long the fierce sun poured down on their unfortunate heads, or they were drenched by storms of rain. Their food was a little bacon and corn meal, often mouldy and unfit to eat; their only drink, water from a stream which trickled through the inclosure, and was thereby rendered for the most part noisome and bad. Washing was out of the question. The place reeked with abominable odours; nearly every face was discoloured by disease or poisoned blood. Through this living mass of suffering John was hurried by Catford and his men, and so stunned was he by what he saw that they had brought him back to the gates again before he remembered that whatever happened he must find out if Seth were still alive.

“Wait for me,” he said, stopping short. “I need no guard, and will be back again in a few minutes. Leave me alone—I must see these things for myself.”

Then he strode away, leaving the lieutenant and his men looking at one another in amazement. The sergeant of the guard would have followed, but Catford called him back.

“No,” he said nervously, “let him go where he pleases—let him go.”

So John went alone. Had the whole guard been at his side, however, they would not have stopped him

now. He was in a white heat of fury at what he had seen, and for the time was careless whether he betrayed himself. To and fro he wandered among the crowd, searching among the filth and misery and blank despair for the face he knew. Nowhere could he find Seth, and at last he came to the conclusion that Seth was dead. He stood still, and looked round once more, slowly. Had his quest come to nothing, after all? Must he go home to Jean and tell her—this? He was at the end of the inclosure farthest from the gates. No—Seth was not here. He turned to go, when some one plucked at him from behind, and a lad who looked barely fifteen said:

“A man would speak to ye. Says he knows ye—will you come?”

John, in his relief, could not answer, but signed to the boy to show him the way, and then saw Seth, white and very thin, lying against the railing.

John threw himself on his knees, while the crowd around him stared and whispered.

“You know me, Seth?”

“I thought it must be you,” he answered faintly. “John, have you *turned*?”

“I have put this on to come and look for you. It was the only way I could get here.”

“You are too late, old friend.”

“Why so?”

“I cannot walk. It will be cholera very soon. The same as the rest. I’ll never see Jean again.”

John bent down until his lips touched Seth’s ear.

“Take heart and strength. You’ll be free in less than a week, and not only you but every one here. I

came to save you alone, but now, so help me God, I will not leave this place until it is in ruins!"

He wrung Seth's hand, passed quickly through the crowd again, and rejoined Lieutenant Catford.

"I have seen all I want," he said, in a tone Jefferson Davis might have used. "You may close the gates."

CHAPTER XXV.

LIEUTENANT CATFORD and his sergeant looked at John with curious eyes.

"Prisoners interest you?" the former said, as they walked away together.

"If they did not," was the rejoinder, "I should not have come to relieve you. I got my wound through a bit of service which my commander rated at more than it deserved. I chose the billet here, because I wanted to take hold of a Yank prison. Show me the plan you mentioned for cheating Sherman if he tried to jump the place."

Catford bit his nails again with indecision, but the confidence and authority of John's tone awed him.

A few yards from the stockade, in full sight of the guard-house but some distance from it, was a small wooden hut. The lieutenant went there and unlocked the door, which was unusually heavy, and a peculiar sulphurous odour filled John's nostrils. The place was dark; the one window it possessed closed with a shutter. Catford lighted a lamp of the kind used by coal-miners, and unbolted a trap-door which covered most of the space inside the hut.

"Come down," he said, "and see for yourself."

They descended a ladder to the depth of several feet, and were in a long, low passage filled with barrels.

"Gunpowder," Catford said with a modest pride. "At the first report of a Yankee advance on Santanelle the fuse will be lighted. The stockade is above us—you see!"

"Do the prisoners know?"

"Certainly. I told them all about it, to prevent surprise when the time came. It is my own invention, though they tell me there is one on a larger scale at Libby. General Winder, at Andersonville, has given instructions that when Sherman is within seven miles of that place his men are to open fire upon the stockade with grape. I think my way is far neater. It has had a wonderful moral effect already. You should have seen the faces of the cusses when I mentioned it. Will it do?"

John had not made any remark since they entered the hut, and Catford found the silence oppressive.

"It is interesting. How did you dig it out?"

"Niggers," Catford said with a grin. "They did not relish the work much, but we found a way to persuade them. Let us get out of it now; the air is choking."

He led the way up the ladder, which John behind his back examined carefully. It was an ordinary builder's ladder and could be pulled up or down by one pair of arms.

"Anything else you would like to see?"

"Guess not—thanks."

"Then come and have a drink. This is terrible thirsty weather."

John acquiesced absently. Half way to the lieutenant's quarters he stopped short.

"Will you sup with me to-night?"

"No—come here. I cannot leave my post. Bad example to my men."

John thought of the stories Bob had told him of Catford's night escapades.

"As you like," he said, after reflection. "But we must share the thing. I will send my man to the hotel for the wine."

Bob had to be found first. He was discovered playing cards with the men off duty. Already he was a favourite among them, and was telling stories now in the broadest Western dialect. He went upon the errand with great alacrity, and returned loaded with sherry, whisky, and a bottle of champagne.

Under the influence of the wine Catford warmed to something like enthusiasm, and confided to his new acquaintance much of his personal history more peculiar than creditable.

The officers of the Confederate army as a whole were gentlemen and men of honour. The tone set by their leaders—Generals Lee, Jackson, and Johnston and J. E. B. Stuart—was so good that their subordinates would have been of bad material indeed had they not been influenced by such noble examples of high breeding and purity of living. But there were exceptions, as must happen in every body of men, and the lower class of Confederate subaltern was neither a credit to his country nor a joy to his

fellow-officers. John listened in silence. Catford and his history were supremely indifferent to him, but that the man should talk suited the purpose which the awful sights of this afternoon had planted in his heart. The prison must be destroyed; the men in it rescued from their living death. While Catford talked and drank, John sipped slowly at his wine and thought. The hours slipped by, and still Catford talked—about himself—and John listened, making plans. But the lieutenant had a well-seasoned head, and it was long before the liquor overcame him. About midnight, however, he was growing very tipsy.

“Burletson, my boy,” he hiccupped solemnly, “do you know the best thing I ever did in my life for my country? I have done many things, but this is the greatest of all—the mine—the mine beneath the prison.” He wagged a forefinger at John. “I will tell you why. If Sherman knew what I know, this place would not be safe a day, nor half a day. Think of that!”

“If Sherman knew,” John said slowly, “if he knew—what?”

Catford chuckled.

“Why, that all the way from here to Kenesaw there is a clear road only guarded by a single picket—not a brigade, not a regiment, not a company, within ten miles.”

“It is sixty miles to Kenesaw.”

“What’s sixty miles to cavalry?”

“The Yanks would raise the country upon them, and cut off their own retreat.”

"Not if they rode by night. Oh, I have thought it all out. I figured it on my map, and I dug that mine. Sherman may come if he dares now. I'll send the whole three hundred Yanks to glory. I am bound to be too smart for 'em. What is a Yank to a Southerner for brains? We've the best blood in the world, sir. We're masters of this continent, and will be always, I don't care how the war goes. Doubt my word—do you doubt it?"

He was becoming quarrelsome now, and banged his fist on the table.

"Show it me on the map," John said, "and I'll believe you."

"There's one on that shelf. Bring it along; I can't, the wine has got into my legs. Not in my head, though, not in my head. Get it—there's a good chap."

John did so and spread out a map of Georgia, a better one than he had ever seen before, upon the table.

"Where's Sherman now? Not far from Atlanta? Curse him. Where's the road? Here. Run your eye along it. I'm drunk, am I? Gad! I know more than you, my boy, though you think you're sober."

John glanced at the map, rolled it up, and went back to his chair.

"You are right."

"Of course I am," Catford said with a chuckle. "Have some more drink and I'll tell you another story, the best of all. A yellow girl this time. A rattler she be, by gum—as the niggers say. Fill your glass, man, full. You don't drink worth a cent."

John did as he was told, and his wrist brushed against the map, which rolled on the floor at his feet. Catford began his story. But he was getting drowsy now and lost the thread of his narrative. He began again, laughing at himself, while John drank the wine he had poured out, and rose from his chair.

“You are not going back to the hotel?”

“Starting now—good-night.”

Catford laughed uproariously.

“Be off then, and be hanged! Pity you have not a stronger head. If I could carry no more than you, I’d shoot myself. See you to-morrow.”

He waved his hand, and John, with one keen look at the man as he tried to fill a glass which he was holding upside down, nodded to himself, and left the room.

He gave a sigh of relief when he was outside, and drew a deep breath of the cool night air. Where was Bob? Card-playing, probably. But John did the little man injustice. He had not gone a dozen steps toward the guard-house before he saw by the dim light a figure holding the horses.

“What is the luck, boss?”

“The best. Where have you been?”

“Oh, among them,” pointing with his thumb behind him. “I had a high old time, but this is a rotten place, and the men are worse.”

“They don’t suspect you?”

“Me? Why, in the whole crowd you could not find such a reb as me. Ask any of ’em. What have you determined on?”

They had mounted their horses and rode home.

"Are you up to a hard ride?" John said, by way of answer.

"Am I not?"

"When does the moon rise?"

"In an hour."

"I shall want you to ride to our lines with a note to Sherman and a map I will give you. Take my horse, as he is the strongest, and make all the speed you can. There is not time for me to give you all the details, but I intend to take this place, and if the general follows out my ideas I hope you will be back here in two days with men enough to cut the guard to pieces."

Bob gave a grim laugh.

"I am in it." Then a sudden thought struck him. "How about you? I can't leave you weltering here."

"You must. If I can fix things, you may find me here in command when you return. Any way, I shall be somewhere near that hut back of the stockade. They have laid a mine from it underneath the stockade, and we must set a guard over the place before anything else is done. Remember that when you get back with the boys."

Bob swore a heavy oath.

"See here, boss, you must change this thing round."

"How?"

"You go—I stay. I will ride over to the lieutenant in the morning and say you had orders to join the regiment and will write him. Anything will do. I do not leave you at the cannon's mouth this way.

S'pose they get wind? Why, they'd burn you in oil! You should have heard what I did 'bout what happened to a nigger who helped a prisoner to escape a while back. Your idea is rank foolishness. I came to stay by you, and I wont go."

"You will," said John, in his quickest tone. "I must remain, because the man I sought is here lying sick. Trust me, Bob, to see to my own skin."

"That I will not."

"Yes. But here we are at the hotel. Stay outside while I go in and write the letter. They must not see you leave. Can you find your way."

"Can I ride a horse? We've been here but two days. What kind of a handful do you take me for?"

John found the hall of the hotel empty; he heard some late drinkers at the bar, but reached his room without attracting notice from any one, and wrote his letter.

"See that the boys reach here at night," John said, handing Bob a parcel. "Come in alone first. If you do not find me near the mine, you will know there is something wrong and can judge yourself what to do next. If the general will not risk it, come back and we will work it ourselves. I know you will not fail me."

Bob gave a short, hoarse laugh.

"If I do, I'm d—d! Good-bye."

He touched his horse lightly with whip and spur, and was out of sight in a moment.

John did not ride over to the prison until the afternoon of the next day. To his surprise he heard from the sentry that the lieutenant was breakfasting.

He found Catford trying to eat, looking very ghastly after his debauch, a mass of official correspondence before him. There was a coolness and stiffness in his manner John did not like.

"I have heard from Richmond," he said, playing with his cup, looking stealthily at John.

"That so? What news?"

"Nothing like what you led me to believe." He paused to munch a piece of bread and watch the effect of his words. John did not move or take his eyes from his face.

"Well, what do they say?"

"Why, that another man is coming to relieve me, not you at all. That is queer."

Catford's eyes were peculiarly alive.

John smiled sarcastically.

"I am not surprised. What is his name?"

"Lieutenant Cunningham; aide to Johnston. I know something about him. He was in trouble a short time since through the loss of important despatches. He don't come from Hardee at all. Did you ever meet him?"

Catford asked this question as an afterthought. He saw John's mouth twitch.

"Cunnington? The name is familiar. When does he come?"

"To-day."

"If it is the man I know," John said, smiling again, "he will be glad to see me here."

CHAPTER XXVI.

LIEUTENANT CATFORD was perplexed when he received his mail, but the conversation with John puzzled him still more. Who and what was this Burletson? The letter from Richmond was simply a formal order that on the 1st day of July Lieutenant Catford was to surrender command of Santanelle prison to Lieutenant Ralph Cunningham and report himself to General Johnston, commander of the army in Georgia. When Catford first read the letter he set John down as a fraud of the first water. He felt it only remained to find out whether he was the victim of a practical joke, or whether—his blood ran cold at the thought—whether this pretended subaltern in the thirteenth Texas regiment was a spy! Just as the horrible idea occurred to him, John came in. Catford's nerves were thoroughly out of order, and his brain muddy and confused with last night's debauch. John's coolness, his evident acquaintance with Cunningham, extinguished the fear that he was a Yankee in disguise and aroused a new suspicion that had been in Catford's mind the day before. A spy he still believed him to be—but from Richmond, not from the enemy. Catford knew that he was not in favour in high places. Some time before, when he

had complained bitterly to friends at Richmond of his long exile at Santanelle, he had been warned that if he did not wish to lose his commission he had better remain quiet, and it was hinted that certain facts of his past life had become known to Jefferson Davis. The President of the Confederacy was a man of strong prejudices and accustomed to act in a very arbitrary fashion where his feelings were aroused. What if this Burletson were an emissary from him; instructed to examine the condition of the prison and its defences and the conduct of its commander? Catford shuddered at the thought, and when his visitor, after some general conversation, said that he wished to see the stockade again, he gave permission with a readiness that he trusted would have a beneficial effect.

“Go anywhere—do anything you please,” he said, with a ghastly attempt at cordiality. “I will give orders to my servants to show you around. There is nothing you may not see.”

John thanked him, and, determining to make the most of his time, asked for the key of the mine. Catford gave it, accompanied him to the guard-house, and issued the necessary orders to his men.

The sergeant, a short, surly-faced Georgian, gave a significant grunt as he went with John to the stockade.

“He gives you leave to do what he’s never done himself till yesterday.”

“Never been in the stockade?”

“No, sir. I don’t care if you know it, and a little more, too. How long will you be around here?”

"That depends upon my instructions."

"Strong-constitutioned man, ain't you?"

"You mean this place is not a healthy one?"

"The most *on*-healthy in creation."

"Prisoners seem sick."

"Oh, blame the prisoners!" the sergeant said irritably, "I mean us boys. We have nothing to eat; nothing to do; no fun, and no fighting; naught but dirt and Yankee funerals all day and stinks all night. *He's* well fixed," with a turn of the head toward the lieutenant's quarters. "Officers don't starve, you bet. But I tell you it's tough for the men. If we did not take some of what they send for the Yanks, we'd not get along at all. You did not know it?" looking shrewdly at John. "Fact. Tell 'em so in Richmond if you like. I 'spose you are from there?"

"Ask your lieutenant," was the reply.

They were at the stockade gates now, where the sentry saluted John, who left a gold coin—Confederate, given him by Sherman—in the sergeant's hand. He then sauntered slowly through the inclosure, looking at the groups of prisoners, speaking to one here and there, as if he were making a close inspection, until he came to the far end, and to Seth, whom he found more comfortable than he had left him. The attentions the prisoners had seen him receive from a reb officer, coupled with the mysterious rumour that had got abroad of help and rescue, had caused them to cultivate Seth's acquaintance. A bed of tattered clothing had been made for him, and some food found. When John sat down by his side and drew from his pocket a pot of beef jelly, slices of chicken

and bread, and a flask of brandy, the speculation among the prisoners began to grow feverish.

"Did you ever see a reb do that before?" one said to his neighbour.

"No, nor do I now. He ain't a reb!"

"He must be."

"I will bet you a week's rations he's not. If he were, wouldn't he find a way of pulling that cuss outside. He's a spy."

"Good luck to him then!"

"Oh, blast him and all the rest of our boys! Why don't they exchange us, or send Sherman round this way? No one cares, I tell you. They let us sicken and die like flies. Damn them—Government, Lincoln, and all!"

"Hush ye!—he's goin' to speak."

John was beckoning to them.

"Boys, crowd round me so that the guard can't see us. Then listen—I am a Union man."

At first they looked at him with blank faces; then one moved forward, then another, until a compact press of bodies surrounded him.

"Before midnight to-morrow," John said in a low voice, "I hope one hundred of Sherman's boys will have reached this place and set you free. I did not mean to tell you beforehand, as these things are never to be depended upon, and I thought I would be here to bring the boys along; but I find now that I shall be discovered before then. I want you to know that I have the key to the mine that runs beneath and that I intend to stay and hold it as long as I am alive. The other danger for you is the guard. Don't give

them any excuse to fire. That is the great point. Keep quiet and let the boys come to you. Whatever happens, don't try to get to them. Above all, the rebs must not have a notion that you know anything; and make no noise, show no excitement, until our boys have pulled those gates apart."

He knelt beside Seth again, while what he had said spread from man to man until all the three hundred knew. Most of them did not believe it, but some—those nearest to him—were convinced that it was true, and as John talked with Seth, these men came one by one and shook hands with him. They said nothing, but many were crying. All understood that if their freedom came it would be paid for with his life.

It was a strange ending to what John had come to do. The day before, had there been time, Seth would have sent his last message to Jean; now it was Seth who would live, for he was only suffering from weakness and bitter homesickness. It was John who must die. He might have thought about saving his own life but for the mine and the fear that his sudden absence would create suspicion on the part of the prison guard! The mine settled the matter. At any risk, it must be closed up and held, or all his plans would be frustrated. He had little time for leave-taking, but between the hand-grips from the prisoners he managed to give Seth his few brief words for those in Chippewa.

"Tell mother, with my love, that I don't worry, because I know that she will feel things are right; and after the first shock is past be glad I died in this

way. She will have Jean, thank God. You will not separate those two! I know you won't. You need not tell me. As to Jean, I do not know that I wish you to say anything. She is yours—not mine. Wait—there is just this." His voice was a whisper now. "Tell her that when I started for you I did not expect much to get back again, but I went because I could not see her break her heart. I loved her more than all the world. There, I did not mean to say it. But it don't matter. You won't tell her that. Now I must go, or they will be seeking me. Heart up, man. Don't give way now—don't think of me; think of to-morrow when the boys march in."

He sprang to his feet, and as he walked out there was a smile on his face that Seth will remember until his last day comes.

CHAPTER XXVII.

JOHN found the sergeant waiting for him at the gates of the stockade. It had reached the men that this officer was on a tour of inspection from Richmond, and as none of them bore any good will toward their commander, they were more than ready to assist the stranger's inquiries. The sergeant was his sworn ally.

"Any kind of thing you want to know or see, I will put you on in a flick," he said.

John did not reply. He was watching a man on horseback, who was approaching them from the town at a smart pace.

"Have you a key to the mine?" John said suddenly. "I was down yesterday, and wish to look at it again."

The sergeant took out a bunch and fumbled with it, while the horseman drew nearer and nearer, and John saw the sunlight glance on the scabbard of a sword.

"You will let me have it back," the sergeant said, wrenching the key free. "There is but two, and this lock is of a peculiar make."

John nodded, took the key, and began to walk toward the hut. The horseman was Cunningham

himself and had turned in his direction. But John was close to the mine, and, slouching his hat over his eyes, he quickened his pace, unlocked the door, and stepped inside before the lieutenant recognised him. Keeping the door ajar, he heard Cunningham address the sergeant and then trot off to Catford's quarters. The danger was over for the moment, but discovery and detection would only be a matter of minutes, for his name was known to both the men. How to make the mine stand a siege? It was hopeless. He shut the door, lighted the lantern, and inspected the hut. Nothing was in it but a barrel of gunpowder; he turned his attention to the trap-door, threw it open, descended the ladder, and measured the distance to the bottom of the mine. It was ten feet. He climbed up again and drew the ladder after him. This was a matter of difficulty, as there was barely room in the hut to dispose of it. Now he heard the sound of footsteps, and the voices of two men—two men only. His heart gave a sudden leap. There was one chance left. Catford, as it turned out, had positively refused to believe that his lieutenant and Cunningham's Yankee courier could be the same man. John blew out the light and crept behind the door. The handle was turned and the two men entered, Catford leading. As Cunningham crossed the threshold, John shut the door swiftly and seized Catford by the throat and belt. A struggle, a heavy fall, and a cry as from the depths of the earth! Cunningham, startled and confused in the darkness, drew back and clutched his revolver, but before he could draw it he was caught round the waist and swung forward; the

ground seemed to slide from under his feet and he dropped down—down into space, until he struck something soft and fell sprawling upon Catford at the bottom of the mine. Above them came the clang of the closing trap-door, and John, panting with his exertions, drew the bolts securely. He stood there a moment listening for any sound outside. None came, and he groped his way to the door and opened it. No one was near. The officers had apparently given no warning to the men of their visit to the mine. To make sure of his ground, however, John locked up the hut and strolled in a leisurely manner to the guard-house. He was relieved to find most of the men at their evening meal.

“Where is the lieutenant?” he said to the sergeant.

“Dunno, sir.—Didn’t you say, Jim,” addressing one of the men, “that he’d walked to the mine with the new officer?”

“That’s so.”

“I have just been there,” John said quietly. “Don’t matter, I will go to the house and wait till he returns.”

He glanced round at the faces before him. None showed the least interest or surprise. He was safe—for the time.

Time—that was the one thing needed. The boys ought to be on their way now. How long would it take them to ride those sixty miles? Would they come at all? He thought so. Sherman would risk a hundred men, and Bob would see that there were plenty to volunteer.

John went to Catford's quarters, and sat down in the same chair that he had occupied the evening before. There was no one in the house besides himself but a negro who was busy in the kitchen. The place was rank with stale cigar-smoke and the fumes of wine and spirits. A bottle of brandy and a dirty glass stood on the table. The man had been drinking again to-day. John took up one of Catford's yellow-back novels, and turned the pages mechanically. What to do next? There were the guns covering the stockade, and the rifles of the men. John began to try and devise means of spiking them, but could think of none. His brain seemed dull and heavy. If only Bob were here with his sharp wits! There seemed nothing to be done but to wait. A restless desire tormented him to go to the hut and peep at the trap-door. But he crushed it. Already he had seen surprise in the sergeant's face at his desire to visit the mine a second time. It was possible that his movements were watched. What was the condition of the men in the mine? The bottom was soft. They would not be severely hurt. But they were firmly held there; no power below could raise that trap-door; no shouting underground could be heard outside the hut.

A step on the floor of the room outside—soft and stealthy. John put the book aside and quietly drew his pistol; then he sprang up with an exclamation, for it was Bob Spenniker.

The little man looked white and exhausted and was covered with dust from head to foot.

"Any one around?" he whispered, glancing suspiciously about him.

"Not a soul. What has happened?"

"I'll tell ye soon. Le'me sit."

He threw himself into a chair, coughing and expectorating violently, while John shut the door and window.

"What's this? Brandy? Jerusalem and honey, that beats all!" and pouring himself out half a tumblerful with a very little water, he drank it and smacked his lips.

"Well, I feel better," taking some more without water and sipping it. "Where's the lieutenant?"

"Safe, just now. Did you get to the army?"

"I did so—and the boys are coming—a hundred, picked by Sherman himself. Gosh, he's keen on the business, you bet! But they won't be here till sundown, maybe later. It won't be no use."

"They'll do better than I thought."

"You thought?" Bob exclaimed contemptuously. "Your idea about riding, boss, don't amount to anything at all. I was in the general's tent at dawn, and by sunup had started back—the boys following as fast as they could lick. If a hundred could ride as one, they'd not be far away now. But they can't, it stands to reason. Besides—I've killed my horse," he added, carelessly, "though that's neither here nor there."

"It is everything to me," John said with feeling. "If there were a chance of my getting through, I should owe it to you."

"Chance! *You're* all right. But where's the lieutenant, anyhow?"

John told him all that had happened, at which

Bob swore fearfully and drank more brandy to the "health of that blasted mine."

"We had better stroll around to the guard, then," he said. "We must not have any of them fooling about near the shanty."

"I have thought about it, and intend sending one of the men to look for the officers in town. Did any one see you?"

"No, sir! I did not know how things might be fixed, so I came the back way."

"Right. Then take my horse and wait somewhere quietly for the boys outside. Remember, if they don't see me, they must strike first for the mine. With that in their hands they have everything."

But Bob stood up with rank mutiny in his face.

"See here, John Burletson, I hev obeyed you oncet, and against my will rode all last night and near all this day, and killed as good a beast as any in this army. I don't leave you again. It ain't in the contract. I came to stay with you. Your life were in some danger before, but there will be hell to pay now when those boys are out—blue hell-fire. If we quit together it'll be a square deal, but no more back-handed revokes. Now, you won't go—I know you won't, because of what would fall on the prisoners; therefore I remain. I don't care about *them* a red cent, but where you are I am going to settle. You go and talk with those boys while I work some food out of the nig cook. I will not be far away from you. Leave me alone, and if the enemy keep quiet I'll leave them alone. If they start in, I'll cut the cards to rights—or try."

John shook his head, but it was only in silent protest. He saw that Bob was determined, and he had not the heart to press the point further.

He found the guard talking in groups, and evidently becoming uncomfortable at the continued absence of their officer. The sergeant looked worried and cross.

"He always was one for going on a bust when the fit seized him," he said to John. "But then it was at night, and after telling me. It's that stranger has took him off. I wanted a spare hour or two to myself this evening. Just my luck."

"Send into town for him," John suggested.

"What's the use? He won't come."

"Say I want to see him at once, then he will."

The sergeant brightened a little.

"That's a healthy idea. I will tell a man to ride there. Do you send a letter by him."

John returned to the house to write one. The air was cooler, the sun drawing near the horizon. Two hours more, and the boys might be here. The letter despatched, John strolled round the stockade with the sergeant. The sun sank lower and disappeared; a dusky gray line appeared on the eastern horizon, spreading minute by minute from a mere film of haze until it became the darkness of the night. They stood together, the sergeant growing more and more uneasy every moment. Suddenly he wheeled round in a listening attitude.

"Hear that?"

John's heart sank. He had heard it—a dull, curious blow. It was the smothered report of a pistol.

"It is from the mine," the sergeant said. "They can't be there after all, and had an accident. Hand me the key."

John felt in his pockets, one after another.

"The thing must have dropped out. But you said there was another."

"Curse it all! The lieutenant has that one, if he's in there."

"He cannot be."

Something is—anyway. Come with us, Cap'n, we must worry this through together."

The sergeant was becoming suspicious. John drew himself up.

"Call your men, then, and get something to force that door." He spoke in a stern tone of command. "If there is an accident, it will be serious work. Lose no time."

He walked away in the direction of the hut, while the sergeant, after a quick glance at him, ran to the guard-house. Again a shot was fired from the mine, and again. All the men had heard them, and came running to the spot fully armed. Then they heard another sound, the report of a rifle—from the lieutenant's house.

"Who in the name of the devil," said the sergeant, stopping short as he was about to dash a musket-butt against the lock, "can have done that?"

"Are all your men here?" John said. "Some one has pulled his trigger by mistake."

"It may be that," growled the sergeant.—"Now, boys, down with this thing."

"It was easier said than done. The door was of

oak, well put together, and the lock, as the sergeant had said, was of peculiar make. Again and again blows were rained upon it, until the musket fell apart in the sergeant's hands.

"Get me an axe," John cried as the men paused, panting. "If you had your wits about you, Sergeant, you would have thought of that before."

A man was off to the guard-house in a twinkling, but several minutes were gained. Two axes were brought, and two men set to work with a will and made the splinters fly. At last the door gave way. It was getting dusk now, and the hut was darker than ever. A match! No one had any—yes, the sergeant found one at the bottom of his pocket. As he lighted it, some one jerked his arm—they were all crowded together—and it went out. Another delay, during which the sergeant swore with bitter emphasis, until a lantern arrived, and in the meantime the sound of smothered voices was heard underneath the trap-door. The excitement grew every minute. The lantern came; the bolts were drawn, the door thrown back, and a man's head appeared—Lieutenant Catford's face, blackened and bruised beyond recognition. The first man he saw as he clutched the edge of the flooring and crawled out was his enemy, standing beside the sergeant. The minute before a thought of escape had entered John's head, but had been dismissed. They might fire the mine. Their rage must be expended on him first. Catford was weak and dazed by the fall and confinement and want of air; but the sight of John roused him to fury.

"The spy!" he cried, "the infernal spy!"

"What are you raving about?" John answered in a contemptuous tone, stepping forward.

"You devil!" shrieked Catford springing at him; but John had expected this, and flung him to the ground. The men stared, stupefied. Then at a word from the sergeant they seized John by the arms.

"I will not resist," he said to them. "But be careful what you are about—there's a mistake."

"Kill him! shoot him!" yelled Catford, now beside himself, but keeping out of reach.

"No, take him prisoner," said another voice—Lieutenant Cunningham's. "Give the man a fair trial."

"Let us get out of this hole, anyway," the sergeant protested. "If there's any firing here, the powder'll be alight."

At this remark there was a general retreat and John was hustled into the open. Then Catford, drawing his sword, thrust Cunningham aside.

"I am in command here. Stand back. Boys, that devil is a Yankee spy. Shoot him like a dog! Ten of you fall in."

"You are a liar," John retorted. "I am no spy.—Lieutenant Cunningham, I spared your life once. Give me time to make an explanation."

Again Cunningham would have interfered, but Catford waved him back.

"Load!" he cried to the men. The ramrods rang sharply. "Present!"

"Crack!"—a single report and flash, which seemed to come from one of the men, and with a gasp and groan the lieutenant himself fell grovelling on his

face. A few of the men fired at John then, but they aimed wildly and the shots flew high.

"Steady, you fools!" the sergeant said. "There's double treason somewhere. That shot was from behind. Close around this man and take him to the guard-house. If one more shot is fired, let go at his heart! Good God! what's that?"

There was a new sound in the air, the thunderous beat of horses' hoofs. The men stood still, dumb, confounded.

"Face about, men, face about!" said Cunningham at the top of his voice. "Fire at the cavalry—fire!"

But his words came too late. A score of horses were trampling round them, a score of sabres flashed above their heads.

"Surrender!" cried a voice, stern and uncompromising. Then, as the Confederates sullenly laid down their arms: "Where is your prisoner? If any harm has come to him, not a man of you shall live!—John Burletson, are you here?"

"You bet your bottom dollar, Major," cried a voice in answer—Bob Spenniker's—"didn't I tell ye I'd see him through? You never knew me break contract yet."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

IT was holiday time in Chippewa. The whole of the Selby family, with the exception of Luke, were staying at the farm with Mrs. Burletson, an arrangement which suited every one concerned except John's manager, Jim Hallet, who was nearly driven wild by the mischievous doings of the Selby boys. These boys, Sam and a younger brother, were animated with the best possible intentions, but they had active minds and more active bodies; and they had both seriously resolved to become farmers. So, when they found that the men about the farm were too busy to answer their innumerable questions, they set out on a voyage of discovery upon their own account. Their system of self-education was a course of practical experiments upon all agricultural produce, living and dead, from the cattle in the meadows and the chickens in the yard to a mower, a straw-cutter, and a wire rat-trap with a rat inside. That they were chased by an indignant bull and nearly tossed; kicked heels over head by a vicious horse; bitten very badly by the rat, which they intended, Sam said, to "train for a circus"; nearly killed by the straw-cutter; and severely cut about the fingers by the mower, did not cool their ardour in the least. They ought in the

end—according to the Sunday-school books—to have met with violent and painful deaths, for they had no mercy on anything that moved; but nothing worse than cuts and bruises happened to them, and when hay-making began even Jim Hallet was mollified by the way the urchins worked, and he was discovered by Jean, one afternoon, teaching Sam to ride.

The summer this year was fine and dry, and in those warm June days Mrs. Burletson and Jean sat out all day long among the grass and flowers and hum of bees and chirp of grasshoppers. They were always busy, sewing hard for the children at home and the boys at the war—for each had her share of work to do for the Sanitary. Sometimes Mrs. Haniman would join them in an afternoon—only that she never sewed. “I find it restful here,” she said once, sighing, “though I always wonder why, for a busier woman never lived than you, Sarah; and you have a heavy care.” This was when they heard that John was dangerously wounded.

Mrs. Burletson looked at Jean.

“I have some one to share it with me, Martha. That is why I get no chance to be lonely.”

Yet they did not talk much in those days. At times Mrs. Burletson would tell anecdotes of John’s childhood, which her companions were never tired of hearing, but Jean said little. It was a restful day for Jean, in spite of the anxiety and suspense. The bond between her and Mrs. Burletson grew daily, and the day the news came that John was well again and had set out for the prison they sat together for a long time holding one another’s hands, and when they parted

for the night, Mrs. Burletson held Jean close and kissed her again and again.

"My dearest girl, what should I do without you now? God was very good to give me such a daughter when he took my John."

"For a time, mother," Jean whispered—"only for a time. John will come back again to you, I know he will. He must."

Mrs. Burletson shook her head.

"He may—I believe that he will, but it cannot be to stay. Years ago, Jean, the day the war began, I said that if ever John went South it would be to make his mark. He has done so. The letter from the President—God bless him!—and the note that doctor sent me the other day, show it. Of course, John says nothing. But I must not forget that as a great soldier my boy belongs to the country and not to me. If when he comes home you ever hear me say one word likely to make him feel that he should stay here, tell me right there. I will not have that happen. His love for me cost him three years of bitter longing; it shall never stand in his way again."

Jean spent a very restless night after this talk. She was anxious about Mrs. Burletson. The old lady was wonderfully cheerful, but Jean saw plainly how she languished for her boy. She would pore over his letters by the hour together, and as time went on she grew more silent, her movements became less brisk, and Jean even fancied she was losing flesh, and was certain that her appetite was not what it ought to be. Dr. Selliger, however, whom Jean called in privately one day, laughed at these fears and said he had

never seen Mrs. Burletson looking so well. But it so happened that the committee, of which John had been the founder, and the doctor the chairman, was enlarging the scope of its work in a manner Mrs. Burletson did not approve, and when the doctor called, she gave him a piece of her mind.

"John ought to be at home," Jean said to herself that night. "I shall write and tell him so. Let other men risk their lives; his is too valuable. The worst of it is, he never thinks of himself, and if he feels it is his duty he will go through with it all. But I am sure when he sees the change in his mother since he went away he will feel that he should stay at home. Yes, I will write," and with this resolution in her mind Jean went peacefully to sleep.

The next day Mrs. Burletson was not so well as usual, and sent Jean into the garden alone. Jean found it dreary work sewing by herself, and was about to see what had become of the boys, when she saw a sturdy figure tearing up the road from town, and recognised Sam. Fearing that some serious accident had happened, Jean ran down the garden path to meet him. As he drew nearer she heard him cheering and whooping in a wild state of jubilation, and was reassured. By the time he reached her his breath had all gone, and, thrusting a telegram into her hand, he threw himself on the ground, exclaiming in a series of gasps:

"Oh, I'm so tired—they're going to have a bonfire—isn't John a trump? Aren't you glad he's coming back?—I am. Hurrah!"

It was the best of news:

“Seth safe; we come home at once.—JOHN.”

It was Jean's turn to speed the good tidings, and, having hugged Sam, to his great surprise, she ran to the house. Mrs. Burletson met her at the door; she had heard the joyful shouts, and Jean thought she looked ten years younger when she read the precious news.

Some days passed, and then the mail from the boys arrived: a letter from John to his mother, one from Seth to Jean. Mrs. Burletson finished hers first, for John, though he did his best, had never written a long letter in his life, while Seth, to Jean at least, had never written a short one. The old lady looked curiously at Jean, and for the first time since John went away felt a sudden sense of disappointment. The girl's face was flushed; her eyes shining with a happy light.

“Is she really content, after all?” Mrs. Burletson thought. Then she reproached herself. “My ideas are foolishness. Yet I did begin to think——”

But now Jean looked up, and Mrs. Burletson's reflections stopped.

“The best letter the dear boy ever wrote. I shall read it to you, mother. It is all about John. Seth tells just what we want to know, of which John will never tell.”

She began to read, and Mrs. Burletson gave a little sigh of relief.

“I was too quick in judging, as I always am,” she thought.

“As to how the thing was done, you just get par-

ticulars from John," Jean read. "I cannot tell you anything first-hand, as I was shut up, limp and miserable. But I know what happened afterward. We had been waiting all day when, just as dusk came in, we heard a scrimmage. We kept quiet as mice and were about as scared, for beneath us they had laid a mine of gunpowder which they swore they'd fire were any attempt made at a rescue. But we listened and held our breath, for it would be death or freedom now. First came a single shot, then a quick volley, then a cheer. 'It's the boys!' some cried. 'It's the rebs!' growled others, 'keep quiet.' But a few minutes afterward we heard a hammering at the gates, and then we knew that we were saved. How we yelled and cried and swore in our delight and joy while they got the keys and unlocked everything, and then when the doors were opened what a rush was made for them! I was too weak to stir, but some of the boys picked me up and the rest made way, knowing I was John's friend. I can see it all now. The moon had come out, shining upon our boys as they sat on horseback, scores of them, laughing and chaffing the prisoners who were now mad or drunk with joy, while in the centre stood John—the man who had worked it all—white as a sheet, but cool and upright, not one bit carried away; not conscious, I believe, that the cheers were mostly meant for him. When he saw me, he ran up, and all he said was: 'They have saved us, Seth. We have to thank Major Templeton and my man Bob for this.' Afterward, we were attacked on the way to Sherman by reb militia, two hundred and fifty strong. It was a surprise. The boys were beaten

back, the major killed, and things looked queer. But they had given John command of a reserve of fifty men, and with these he charged. I saw it all, for we were on a hill at the time. If ever I had been in doubt that John was a fighting man, I must have taken back my words then. Steady as a rocket and straight as a line he led his men upon their centre. They met him fairly, but naught could stop his boys. What was the secret? Why, they were *led*. When we got safe to the army at last, the first man to shake hands with John was General Sherman himself. He did so before all his staff, and you should have heard the cheering. John will be promoted, of course. Yet he declares he will come home with me. I'll believe it when I see it. He's the hero of the army now. 'That 1 or any of those three hundred prisoners are alive to-day is owing to John, and every man here knows it, and before long all the folk at home, from Lincoln downward, will know it too.'

"That is a real beautiful letter, my dear," Mrs. Burletson said, wiping her eyes. "It is pleasing of this young man to write so of my boy—yet he should, should he not?"

"Yes," Jean said, looking with hungry eyes at the sheets in Mrs. Burletson's hands. But she did not see their contents this time, and felt pained and hurt. She was beset by a vague yearning and unrest, which troubled and perplexed her, and after this she did not talk of John so freely to his mother as before.

John kept his word. The pressure put upon him to remain in the army was very great; but in his breast pocket he carried something which caused him

to withstand it all—the letter from Jean. She had written, as she had resolved to do, putting down in plain words her anxiety about his mother. After he read this, all the glory and offers of promotion in the world availed nothing with John. His return home, however, was delayed longer than he expected. General Sherman, amid the rush and turmoil of the taking of Atlanta, found time to send a few lines to the President about Santanelle, inclosing Lincoln's own letter, and recommending that, though John refused to serve, he should be given a captain's commission. Lincoln telegraphed an affirmative reply, and wrote to John, telling him to come and see him. This correspondence caused the destruction of John's peace for many a day. The papers picked it up, and the news of the exploit spread through the North. Before John had been in Washington an hour he was stormed by interviewers. Before he had been there ten hours all the public men from whom he had humbly sought the boon of an introduction to the President called upon him with compliments and invitations to their houses. Then, through a base plot organised by Seth, he was photographed, and the next day his likeness was in the shop windows and people cheered him in the streets.

John bore it well enough, on the whole. He was ably supported by Seth, who seduced him into the purchase of an officer's uniform, and was invaluable to the press men by the number of circumstantial details of John's life and late adventures with which he supplied them. But in one thing John was unyielding. He had promised his mother that he would not

stay in Washington more than two days, and no invitations from great people, no flattery—nothing—could induce him to break that promise. On the second day, therefore, before they went to keep their appointment with President Lincoln, tickets were taken for the midnight train.

Lincoln received John with the smile of an old friend.

“You are welcome, truly welcome, Burletson,” he said, with a long hand-shake. “Is this the man you went to visit in the South? I am pleased to meet him. A Northerner who has tasted Southern hospitality—and lived—is worth seeing.”

He made them both sit down, and asked them many questions, keeping them with him an hour. When they rose at last to take their leave, he grasped John’s shoulder and turned his face to the light.

“You are older by years, friend, since we met. Is that your wound, or fever?” he slipped his hand down and felt the muscles of John’s arm. “No, it is not fever; you are hard as hickory wood. It is trouble of the mind—yet you sold your hogs and now carry back your fifty dollars with interest.” He smiled with a quaint shake of the head. “I do not like you, John. You have cold-shouldered Uncle Billy, who is your best friend, and have left the army ladder for some one else to climb. The country wants you. I, its representative, tell you so to your face. You are a fraud, as I told you once before. What does it mean? What have you to answer?—say.”

“My folk, sir—my mother—wants me most of all.

You, Mr. President, have a thousand men as good and better. My mother has only me."

"Yet you left her," Lincoln said sharply. "You set no price at all upon your life—to see those hogs."

John dropped his eye.

"There was—no one else to go," he muttered.

"H'm!" said the President, glancing at Seth. "No doubt that was so—but, well, I wish I knew any man who would do as much for me."

He looked slowly from one face to the other, and still holding John with his right hand, placed his left upon Seth's shoulder.

"How long is it since you boys first met?"

"A year before the war," Seth answered.

"Yes, I remember what you told me, Burletson—all that you told me. Mr. Cotton—that I believe is your name—tell me what you think. Will you?"

Seth started at the sudden question, and then looked confused.

"I don't—I really do not know—what to think of it all," he said lamely.

He found it very difficult to speak, under the gaze of those searching eyes.

"You do not. Then let me tell you a little story. Two boys once saw an apple growing, away up on a tree. It was the finest apple they had ever seen. Both wanted it; but one had chores to do, and reckoned to see them through first. The other had no chores, and climbed and picked the apple. Coming down, he lost his hold and hung by a branch over a spiked fence. He cried for help, and the first boy left his chores, went up that dangerous tree like a

young buck 'possum, stepped right among the branches over the spiked fence, and pulled the climber out of danger at the risk of his own life. Meantime the apple had dropped upon the grass. The boy who picked it took it up and ate it, but it was said by some that the apple did not belong to him. Now, friends, my time is up, and you must go. Goo-bye, John Burletson." He shook hands with them both, and as John tried to thank him he made a gesture of impatience.

"That is just nonsense. I am placed here to do what one man may for the nation. That often means hard things to the individual. In your case I did my best to kill you. I knew the risk you ran, and God, when he brought you safely through, my friend, treated me better than I deserved."

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE journey from Washington to Chippewa is tiresome enough even at the present day, and in 1864 was still less comfortable. But to Seth, after all his hardships and bitter sufferings, it was a pure luxury. He had picked up in strength very quickly, and was now quite able to enjoy life as long as he did not exert himself. The lazy existence in the railway train suited him exactly. In Washington the excitement and bustle had been very trying, and though he enjoyed it in a way, yet, when John, in a final burst of impatience, had said that the fuss "made him more tired than if he had been in the saddle twenty-four hours," Seth, though he laughed, felt disposed to agree with him.

Seth held no illusions concerning himself. He was inclined rather to underrate his own powers, and was John's most outspoken admirer. But the everlasting hymn of praise poured forth in honour of his old rival became a trifle wearisome after a time, and aroused a desire for some, if ever so little, public recognition of his own services and sufferings. The interview with Lincoln was a climax. The meaning of "the little story" was obvious enough, and Seth spent a very uncomfortable half hour thinking it

over. Then he threw the thought aside—the analogy was false. Jean belonged to him because she loved him. He could not, if he wished, give her to John. Until she repented of her choice and told him so, the President might go hang! As they journeyed northward, the longing for Jean became overpowering, and his heart swelled with the pride of possession. Let John receive all the praise and glory that was his due, and even the overpraise that sentimental people poured upon his head. He, Seth, had something better than all this waiting him at his journey's end—something that John would have given his fame ten times over to possess. “In story-books, goody-story books,” Seth comfortably reflected as he smoked a fragrant Havana which John had given him, “old John would return to find the lady of his love so dazzled by the greatness of his achievements that I, in common decency, would have to bundle myself away at the shortest possible notice back to the war and get killed out of hand. In real life these come out differently. Nevertheless, confound the President! His little story will leave a nasty taste in my mouth to my dying day. Poor old John!”

The night that John and Seth returned to Chipewa will not soon be forgotten by the good folk there. Since the day the local paper had doubled its circulation by reprinting paragraphs from the great organs of the East about the “Wisconsin patriot,” every soul in the place, from the minister to the youngest of Seth's old pupils, determined that a reception worthy of the occasion should be accorded to

John. There was to be a band, a torchlight procession, and a grand supper at the store. The railway depot was hung with flags, and Chinese lanterns, which were to be lighted with the torches when the train was signalled. Every one was there, and cheered heartily when Mrs. Burletson, in the very best of all her dresses, leaning on the arm of Luke Selby, chairman of the festivities, walked to the place of honour in the centre of the platform. With her was Jean, still in mourning for her mother, but with fresh flowers in her hat and dress. Many a nod and smile passed from neighbour to neighbour. "What a daisy she is!" the sheriff whispered to his friend the saloon-keeper, "and what a pity she waits for Seth! She took the wrong one, Job, my boy, that I will always say, when she had him and mittened John."

The whistle of the approaching train now sounded, and every one drew breath for a cheer. Mrs. Burletson stood up and took Jean's hand. The engine light travelled along the platform, but the rattle of the cars and the screech of the brakes were quickly drowned by the yell of men and boys as they recognised John in his captain's uniform, standing on the platform of the car, waving his hat to his mother. Seth was beside him and forgot to feel this time that he was left in the cold, for there was Jean's face, eager and beautiful—the face that belonged to him. There was little time, though, for private greetings. A hurried word and hand pressure, and then they passed from the cars between the lines of cheering townsfolk and the music of the band.

John came first, his mother on his arm, the proud-

est mother in the North that day, Seth following with Jean, who was a trifle pale, somebody remarked, and was looking tired. At the entrance to the depot a carriage was waiting, into which Luke handed Mrs. Burletson and Jean, John and Seth following. Then six young men drew out the horses, amid ecstatic shouts from the crowd, and placed themselves in the shafts; the torch-bearers ranged alongside; the band took up position in front and struck up a favourite air with might and main, and away they went in full procession down the main streets of the town. As they approached the store the band played "Tramp, tramp, tramp!" and here the enthusiasm of the people broke all bounds; and when John, having mounted the platform, turned to face his friends and make the speech he felt was inevitable, a thousand throats roared out the refrain of the last verse of the Union prisoners' song:

"On, on, on the boys come marching,
Like a grand majestic sea,
And they dashed away the guards
From the heavy iron doors,
And we stood once more beneath our banner—*free!*"

After this they cheered again until no one had any breath or voice left. Then John spoke:

"I thank you, friends, for your splendid welcome. Seth has asked me to do the speaking for us both, and, though he would do it twice as well as I, I am glad to address you. First, I want to say this: The papers have printed a great deal of stuff about me. Don't you believe a word of it. I am almost

ashamed to show my face, after what I've read. There is only one hero in this thing, and they scarce mentioned him. But I will name him to you—this man who stands by me.”

As he turned to Seth, and the crowd hoarsely cheered, his eyes met Jean's. “Ay, boys,” he cried, becoming eloquent for the first time in his life, “cheer him all you know. He deserves it and more. He fought three long years for his country; he was badly wounded once, and has endured hardships right along. Then for six months he lay in Santanelle prison. What he suffered you will never know, and I, though I saw something, do not realize it all. It was a martyrdom of pain and misery. But God has been merciful to him and his, and he has returned in safety. On his behalf as well as on my own, I thank you for your greeting.”

When the speeches were done, then came the supper in the store. It was long after midnight when John and Seth reached their beds. The next morning John rose betimes and drove his mother home. He was dressed in his workaday blue jean trousers and rough brown coat; and though his friends tried to call him “Captain,” the effort soon became too great; they dropped into old habits of speech, and came back to plain John Burletson at last.

Seth left his room later—he had been much exhausted by the excitement the night before. John had departed, Luke was in the store, and Jean was in the kitchen with her sleeves turned up, busy with household work.

“This is a change,” he exclaimed, as he noticed

the plainness of her dress, and a tinge of redness in the hands and wrists that used to be so white; not to mention a big coarse apron, which in old days Jean had said was a thing she would never wear.

“I hope so,” she said, with half a smile and half a sigh, for Seth’s presence brought back sad memories. “A more useless creature than I when you went away did not exist, I suppose. But mother’s illness changed all that. I *had* to work. Now sit down at that table while I get your breakfast ready. Poor dear, you look very tired still. You must take things easy to-day and for many days.”

Seth did as he was told, and as he watched Jean’s quick, deft movements she reminded him of her mother, and he was not sure that he quite liked it. But the changes in her face that these three years had wrought were to the good; he felt that strongly. It was a rounder, sweeter face, the mouth more tender in expression, the eyes softer and less aggressive than they used to be; yet the whole firmer in outline and as beautiful as ever.

Seth took things easily for a month. Thanks to his constitution, a habit of temperate living and youth, the prolonged hardships even of Santanelle, left no permanent weakness behind, and after a four weeks’ holiday he felt as well able to do a man’s work in the world as ever. The first point was to find the work; the second one, to earn enough to marry. Both these things, before Seth had been a week in Chippewa, began to cause him no little anxiety, which in its turn did not tend to improve his temper, which that three years’ campaigning had considerably

roughened. The quiet life at the store soon became intensely irksome to him; the children were an unmitigated nuisance; Luke Selby bored him, and he could never see as much of Jean as he considered he had a right to do. Marriage was the only remedy for this. The way to that was by securing a reappointment as master of the school, and by good luck and influence inducing the managers of the school to give him a sufficiently substantial salary. Circumstances were in his favour; the present schoolmaster was not a capable man and was under notice of dismissal, and the chairman of the board was Luke himself. No sooner, however, were Seth's practical difficulties in the fair way of clearing themselves than a vague uneasiness began to haunt him, which one day, four weeks after he came home, broke out into a definite and distinct trouble of mind. It struck him that Jean, apart from the sense of responsibility toward her home duties, was not so eager as himself for the arrival of their marriage day. At first Seth scouted the idea as absurd. All this month she had spent every spare moment away from her work and her household exclusively with him. She had not even been to see Mrs. Burletson; and in their walks and drives had cheerfully discussed his plans and approved of his application for the schoolmastership, and at his request had spoken to her father about the matter. Yet he was not content. It might be fancy, but at times he thought she showed a tendency to be absent-minded when they were alone, a habit which was growing upon her. When, in the light of this thought, he looked back upon their talks together, he remem-

bered that every plan for the future had been suggested by himself. Jean had passively agreed to them all, and had initiated nothing. With some women this would be natural enough, but it was not like Jean. In old days she had always been full of ideas—too full, he had sometimes thought. Now she had none. Then, when he had spoken hopefully of his chances for the school through her father's position, she had been very unresponsive, and had obviously disliked speaking to him. At the time Seth had put this down to a certain estrangement which he noticed had grown up between father and daughter; but, taken with the rest, it might mean something very different.

At length Seth could keep his thoughts to himself no longer, and one day, when they were out driving, the impulse to prove this matter to the root fastened upon him.

"Jean, I want to ask you something," he said. "Do you know that we have been engaged three years?"

"It is a long time."

"Do you really think so?"

She looked up quickly.

"Why do you ask that question?"

"I will tell you." He looked away as he spoke. "Since I have been home I have moved heaven and earth to get an appointment and see some clear road to our marriage. I want to be married, and I have a right to, after all this time. I want to be first in your thoughts and to give my life to you. As things are now, I worry and fret and wear until I could snap

my own head off, as I did Sam's this morning, poor little chap! Now, you are very different; women always are, I guess, and you have a family to think and do for—I have not a soul. But patience—even yours—ought to have limits. Even a woman, if she really loves, must want to be married some time. Lately it has struck me that—well, that I am doing all the talking about this thing, and that it is time you began—if you find it any way interesting.”

He spoke brusquely at the end, and turned to her with a frown; then, seeing a troubled look on her face, he blamed himself for hurting her feelings.

“I have the children on my mind, Seth,” Jean said, after a pause. “I want to make you happy. But I must not forget Sam and Tom and Mamy. I will tell you how I plan things out. In the spring—and I could not come to you before, whatever happened—Sam will go to work under father to learn the business, which may some day be his. Tom, who is to be a lawyer, as he seems the smartest of the boys, is to go away to a school at Marathon. Mamy is the difficulty. Mrs. Haniman would adopt her to-morrow, but the child clings to me, and I do not feel I should be doing my duty if I gave her up to any one else. What do you think? Would you mind very much if she came to live with us?”

“Is that all the trouble?” Seth exclaimed in a tone of genuine relief. “That is nothing. Mamy and I are excellent friends. She may come and welcome. Why didn't you tell me of this before?”

He laughed, his sanguine nature already on the re-

bound; but Jean's face did not brighten, and Seth stopped laughing.

"Go on," he said; "there is something more."

"Seth," she said with a touch of her old impulsiveness, "I wish you had never asked me to speak to father."

"Why?"

"He thought that I wanted to ask him a favour. He made me feel quite ashamed of it."

Seth shrugged his shoulders.

"If a man may not ask a favour from his future father-in-law, especially when it will cost him nothing, what may he do?"

"It was I, not you, who had to ask it," Jean retorted with a sudden flash that took Seth back three years of his life. "But that is not what I wanted to say," she added hastily. "I did not mean to ask him a favour at all. I would have scorned to do such a thing. It was simply a matter of business—a good business for the board, for you are the best teacher they ever had, and, as I told father, you did not ask him to give you one cent more than you could honestly earn."

"You told him that?" Seth exclaimed spitefully, cutting the horse with the whip. "Why?"

"Why—Seth?" She looked at him in astonishment.

"I repeat why?" he continued, lashing the horse until he bolted. "Keep quiet, you fool!" to the horse. "If you don't slow down, I'll cut you to pieces!—I asked you to speak, Jean, instead of doing so myself, because the school must give me twice

what the present man gets; that's all. I thought you would understand. Now, your father is just the man to take you at your word, for he hates me. Well, that chance is gone. But he is not the only member of the board. I will see Selliger and Thorpe again, and—by George! I did not think of it before—John has just been made a member—I will get at him.”

“Seth!” Jean grasped his arm tightly. “You will not!”

“Don't be too sure,” Seth replied, setting his teeth obstinately, while something in her tone made him feel cold and weak, “the thing has to be done. I will earn the money they give me, no fear of that. But, first, I must get it. If I do not, we should be no nearer marriage after I get the school than we are to-day; and, rather than wait in this way, I would go back to the army. I am in dead earnest, I assure you.”

He looked it as he lashed the frightened horse.

But Jean did not seem to have heard his last words.

“If you go to John,” she cried, too angry for the moment to measure her words, “and ask him to vote you public money, I can never respect you again. It would be mean, dishonourable, and quite useless. Indeed, I would not advise you to suggest such a thing to John.”

Seth turned from the horse and looked at her with whitening lips.

“Indeed!” he said, slowly. “Is that your opinion? Then we will drop the subject.”

He did not speak again until they got home, but

drove at a gallop all the way. When they reached the store, he led the horse at once to the stable and groomed it himself, and Jean did not see him until after she had put the children to bed. Then she found him reading in the parlour. Her anger had cooled by this time, though she was still hurt and surprised.

“Seth, dear,” she said, going straight to him, “tell me that you did not mean what you said this afternoon.”

He threw away his book.

“My darling, I did—but I don’t now. You were right, and I knew it. I am a savage, unprincipled brute. Until you belong to me for good and all, beware of my temper! But I will not go to John.”

CHAPTER XXX.

A LETTER came for Jean the next morning from Mrs. Burletson, inviting her and Seth and the children to spend a day at the farm. Jean handed it to Seth.

“ Shall we go? ”

“ Why do you ask? Don't you wish to? ”

Jean filled Mamy's plate with porridge before she answered.

“ Yes, if you would enjoy it. ”

“ We will certainly go. ” He told the children, and watched their delight with a curious grimness.

“ You should have kept it a secret till after breakfast, ” Jean said. “ They will eat nothing now. ”

They did not eat much, and until they were allowed to leave the table talked incessantly of what they would do and see.

Upon their arrival at the farm the young people relieved their elders of their presence and sought their old haunts and revelled there, while John and Seth went to inspect the stock, and Mrs. Burletson and Jean sat in their accustomed nook in the garden.

“ My dear, you are not well. ”

It was the first remark Mrs. Burletson made as Jean settled back cosily into her chair.

“Don’t say that, mother dear. I am only a little tired. I have not been sick, and now I feel—happy.”

She sighed a contented sigh, and looked dreamily across the fields waving with their crops of grain to the horizon line.

“It is eight months ago to-day,” Mrs. Burletson said, “since you brought us the news that Seth was a prisoner. Much has come and gone in those eight months.”

“Yes, indeed.”

Another pause—a very long one.

“Jean, my daughter, will you listen to me?”

Jean’s dreaminess vanished at the old lady’s tone, and her heart beat painfully.

“I must speak, child,” Mrs. Burletson went on, “though God knows I am the last who should. Yet, come what may, you are too dear to me for my pride to stand against my duty. I promised your mother I would try and take her place. I speak now as your mother, yours only. Jean, you are not happy—you, whose lover is home from the war, delivered from his peril through God’s mercy by my dear John. Your face has care in it that I did not see a month ago. Why is this? What does it mean? Will you tell me if you can?”

Jean considered a moment.

“It means, mother,” she said—“it means that Seth and I do not agree about things as we used to do. We are both to blame. But the fault is mostly mine. How did you think he looked?” She asked the question anxiously.

"He does not appear in very great spirits. But I do not know his face well enough. Ask John."

She saw Jean shiver.

"Oh, no. Indeed, he would not mind one bit. I know what is worrying Seth. It is want of money. He feels the waiting terribly, and thinks I might help him if I would."

"You!" exclaimed Mrs. Burletson. "Does he want you to earn a living for him?"

"No, no. It is what I feel—what he thinks I feel."

"What do you feel, my dear? Oh, be very sure. I have seen lives wrecked and lost that might have been so happy if girls had but looked enough into their hearts before they married. Your fate is in your own hands; but if it would relieve you to tell me anything——"

She paused and waited breathlessly.

"I cannot," Jean said at last. "I could not tell any one. Besides, I have decided. If Seth gets the place as schoolmaster, we'll be married in the spring. We shall be poor, but I don't mind that. I shall keep Mamy with me, and father will pay for her. Three years ago I promised to be Seth's wife. He went to the war for my sake then; he has no one else to care for him now. So I will do my best to make him happy. That is right, mother. I know it must be right."

There was an appeal, almost a question, in the words, though they were said firmly enough. But there was no response from Mrs. Burletson. For per-

haps the only time in her life she dared not give advice.

"I am afraid, Jean," was all she said, "my ideas would not help you any. I will keep them to myself."

They were silent again, and looked out upon the garden and cornfields, as they had so often done in former days. But they sat no longer hand-in-hand. By imperceptible degrees Mrs. Burletson turned away, took up her knitting and became absorbed in it. A separation had begun—a separation which Jean felt would grow deeper and deeper as time went on, and her heart sank.

The guests left the farm early—far too early for the children, who grumbled vigorously. But Jean was firm, and they were at home before seven o'clock. At nine Jean found Seth alone, waiting for the talk they always had before Luke came in from the store. This evening she saw at once that he was out of temper; and a sense of weariness, almost of despair, overcame her. Jean did not remember that the sight of the substantial comfort on John's farm, and evidence of his ample means, were gall and wormwood to Seth. He had been thankful to get away from it all—from the keen-faced old lady who loved him not; even from John, whose cordial and frank good nature were an aggravation in themselves.

"I hope you enjoyed yourself," Seth snapped out, as Jean came in.

"Yes, I told you how good Mrs. Burletson has been to me, ever since mother fell sick."

"Only Mrs. Burletson?"

Seth did not mean anything serious by the question, but he was in the kind of humour when it is a relief to be as disagreeable as possible.

Jean coloured.

"Of course I enjoy seeing John, if you mean that. He is the oldest friend I have."

"And the best? If you want to say it, don't mind me. I am not jealous."

He spoke banteringly, but an old, old wound had stirred.

"The best," Jean repeated—"the best that you and I have ever known."

"Do you think so? How some people can change!"

Seth was really angry now. He had spoken only half the truth when he said he was not jealous. He did not fear John as a rival in Jean's affections, but her words of the day before were rankling still.

"Oh, I mean it," he went on, in answer to a look of amazement in Jean's face. "John is a good fellow. I have always said so; but it seems to me that you are the last person who should hold him up as a pattern citizen to me."

"Please explain why."

The heat of old days, which was seldom seen in Jean now, had come to the surface again.

"That is easy," he retorted. "I have only to quote your own words. Who was it, when some of us volunteered for the war, and threw away our chances in life—and John did not—who said he was a coward, and that she could never respect such a man again, whatever his reasons for holding back might

be? Then after we were engaged, and I warned you that we should have to wait years before we could be married, who said she would rather wait ten years for a man who did his duty, and then work for his living, than marry one who meanly stayed at home, even though he had a million dollars a year? That was three years ago, you will say. I grant that, but you meant your words, and some of them hold good still. Wait a moment," as Jean began to speak, "I have not done yet. I am sick of having John flung at my head. If you think he is so much greater than you used to do, perhaps you think me correspondingly less; indeed, I begin to guess this may be so, after what you said the other day. Was your promise to marry me made under a mistake?"

He flung the words, regardless of consequences. The air had been full of thunder lately and must be cleared.

"Have you finished now?" Jean said, as he paused.

"Yes. Speak your mind."

"I will. You are unjust and worse. Not to me only—I don't blame you for that, I deserve it for the wrong things I said three years ago; but to make a grievance out of what I said of John, and to speak slightly of the man who for your sake faced certain death, that is mean. I can hardly believe my ears. Three years ago you defended John when every one misjudged him. You have changed indeed from the Seth I loved then."

"You loved?" he said quickly. "Does that mean that your feeling is different now?" He was pale and

grave, his impatience and impetuousness killed by a sudden dread.

"It means"—Jean caught her breath, startled by the turn he had given to her words—"it means that if you seriously believe that anything I said about John in my blindness and ignorance is still true, then you are not the man I loved."

"In short, that you now care for John more than you care for me? Come, let me hear the truth."

"Seth! you are insulting and cruel. My words meant no such thing, and you know it."

"I beg your pardon, I do not know it. If you feel insulted, I am very sorry. I do not intend to give you pain."

"What right have you to make such an insinuation?"

"I don't insinuate. For God's sake, Jean, do not misunderstand me! I respect John, I say. I reverence you. When I brought in his name first, it was a joke—in bad taste, I admit—but only a joke. Then I lost my temper. You are very angry at what I said—quite right! But I cannot help thinking there is something more on your mind, whether you are aware of it or not. Let me ask one thing more. Can you say now, solemnly, that you will take me as your husband and love me, for better or worse, for richer or poorer, till death do us part—can you say that?"

There was a pause before Jean answered, only for an instant, but to Seth it seemed eternity.

"I have promised to be your wife," she said, in a low, steady voice. "I will keep that promise."

"That is not enough. I want more than that. You must tell me——"

Jean covered her face with her hands. "Not to-night. To-morrow we will talk it quietly out. I could not now. I am too tired."

Seth looked at her, breathing hard; then he controlled himself, and drew her hands into his own and kissed her.

"Poor love, you are worn out with my tantrums. Go to bed at once. I will let it be."

Jean's eyes filled with tears. All her anger had evaporated long ago; she felt very weary and very grateful.

"You are good. Do not worry over me. It will be all right to-morrow."

When Jean had gone, Seth took up a book to read; but he found the air of the room stifling, and went into the store. This was worse; so he strolled out into the street, and, avoiding all acquaintances and friends, walked on until the town was behind him and he was alone in the silent starlit night. He remained out for two hours; and got back just as Luke was shutting up for the night.

"Late walking, Seth."

"I like it best."

"It is a way young folk have sometimes. I have been hunting for you."

"On business?"

"Yes. The board has met and fixed up about the school. They will offer it to you."

"That so?"

"They took some time to do it. They wanted

you, but balked at the money you need. The vote went in your favour at the last though; and if fifteen hundred dollars a year and a house will meet your ideas, the thing is settled."

Seth gave an exclamation of surprise.

"Indeed, yes. I never thought they would give so much."

"Nor did I," said Luke with a dryness of tone which Seth noticed at once. "Nor would they, but you had a friend who argued for you till he got his way. The thing came the way it did because of him. You needn't say I said so."

"Who was it? You?"

"No, John Burletson."

CHAPTER XXXI.

SETH was thoroughly weary, tired out in body and brain, when he met Luke. He had been trying to analyze his talk with Jean and decide judiciously whether she had only been indignant with his ill-temper, or whether her love had really been slowly dying in three years of separation until only "duty" remained. He had failed, as men under such circumstances always do fail, his mind becoming at last a mere pendulum swinging back and forward. It was absurd to doubt her love; it was certain that she did not love. Why should she have renewed her promise to marry him if her love were dead? Why should she be so indignant at his reminder of his old sentiments if those sentiments had not undergone a revolution?—and so on.

Two hours of such reflection will reduce the strongest man to imbecility. Seth walked home limp and nerveless. Then came Luke's news, and excitement took the place of lassitude; hope became paramount, and Seth went to bed to sleep soundly and dream happy dreams.

He woke betimes next morning, and, with his spirits still at their best, sought Jean. There could be no time for any talk now, for the children per-

vaded the place, but he might find opportunity to tell her about the school. He caught her in the passage, and before he spoke turned her face to the light. He was struck in a moment by her paleness, the dark rings under her eyes, and the coldness of her fingers.

"Jean," he exclaimed, "you have not slept all night."

"Not very much."

"I have something to tell you—something most astounding!"

He felt her hands tremble and shrink.

"You mean about the school?"

"You know it all, then?"

"Father has just told me."

He drew a slow, deep breath, and the light in his eyes died out.

"It is rather overwhelming, isn't it?" he said faintly.

The clasp of her hands grew firm again.

"It is what you wished, exactly."

He looked at her with a dazed expression. There was not a spark of colour in her cheeks; yet she held his hand.

"I wish I could understand you, Jean."

She shook her head and smiled at him.

"Do men ever understand women? Come to your breakfast, dear boy, and never mind me."

He turned slowly to obey her, when the passage door was opened and with a rush Sam tore up to them with a letter in his hand.

"It's for Seth, from the army!" he cried. "I've

run all the way from the post office. I guessed it might be important."

They laughed at the boy's earnest face, and then joined the others.

"From the captain of my company," said Seth, when he had read the letter, looking at Jean. "Grant is pressing Lee hard, he writes, and the army feel that they have a man in command who means business at last. The cry is for men, fighting men—not bounty-jumpers, who get five hundred dollars for enlisting and run at the first shot. Cap says there was never greater need for men than now, or a better chance of promotion."

He turned to his letter again, and read it slowly, one eye on Jean all the time, while his coffee cooled and his bacon remained untasted. At last he put it aside and began to eat. Suddenly, as if he had remembered something, he dropped his knife and fork.

"Excuse me, Jean. I have a man I want to see," and leaving the table he hurried away, half his breakfast still untasted.

Luke Selby looked after him knowingly.

"Is our schoolmaster touched with war fever again?"

"It is not likely," Jean said, "after what you told him."

"Well—you know, I do not. If he should go, it will be to stay. There will not be another vacancy in the school, that I can tell him. What else he is fit for, I have not a notion, but it is not my business."

Jean did her work very badly this morning. She was thankful it was not a holiday.

In an hour a message came from Seth. It was a scrawl in pencil on the leaf of a pocket-book: "Don't wait lunch. I can't tell when I may be back."

The note was brought by one of the lads from the Burletson farm, who said in answer to questions, while devouring doughnuts and milk: "I don't guess he will be round to-day, Miss Jean, if you ask me. It is market-day, but the boss is staying at home with Seth and sending Jim, which I've never known him to do before."

At the farm John and Seth were alone together.

"They want me back at the front," Seth had said, by way of greeting, handing John the letter. "I have just come to tell you that I reckon to go."

John's reply had been to lead the way to the upper story of an old granary and point to a pile of corn-sacks.

"Set down there. Go right ahead and tell me what this means."

"If cap's letter had come twenty-four hours ago," Seth continued, "I would not have looked at it. Now—it is different. I owe it to you that you should see my reasons, though."

"I see nothing yet."

Seth clasped his hands across his knees and looked John in the face.

"It would be a wicked business for a man to go to the war if he were 'bout to marry."

"Then you cannot go."

"Yes—for I shall never marry."

John looked up to see whether his companion had taken leave of his senses.

“What has happened, then?”

Seth rocked himself to and fro, as if in bodily pain, with white-set face.

“I do not know,” John went on before Seth could answer, “that I have any business to ask the question, but why have you come to me at all?”

“Because I want advice—no—not advice. I mean I need to talk to some one I can trust, or I’ll go mad. Jean does not care—that—for me! Don’t shake your head. D—n it, man, should I talk like this if I were not sure? No, she has not said so, she won’t say so; but I know it now. See, I will tell you all about it from the beginning”—then, recollecting himself—“no, I can’t do that. But it was this way: I had not a suspicion until last night. Then we had a long talk, which made me feel very uneasy. I did not see clearly though; the idea was too sudden, too terrible to realize all at once; but the more I thought about it the bigger it grew. Things that have happened since we came back from Georgia, things I had not noticed, took hold upon my mind last night and held me. But this morning, when I told her of the school, then I *knew*. She was brave, loyal to the last, God bless her! She does not know now that I have made up my mind to go——”

John stopped him.

“You have not told her?”

“Not yet.”

“Then go and do it at once.”

“I have not finished,” Seth went on.

John went to the granary door.

“When Jean knows and has given you her answer,

come back to me and we will talk all day if you wish. I will hear nothing till then."

He was as pale as Seth now, and as much excited, though his voice was quiet. Seth went up to him.

"John, if you were any other man, what you say would be right. But, after Santanelle, this will not do. Jean shall know that I am going away; but you must tell her. I am determined upon that."

"I tell her? You are mad!"

"Then I will write from Washington."

"You are clean crazy, Seth."

"I wish I were."

"If you go to the war," John went on, raising his voice, "I tell you that you are a lunatic or a scoundrel."

"Why?"

"When you and I were at the stables yesterday, Jean and my mother talked of you, and mother, seeing Jean was worried, asked the cause. She found that the chief one was your own poor chances, as you thought, of marriage. Your happiness was Jean's first consideration and her last. As you have said so much, I will tell you something. After hearing this from mother, I went to that school meeting. They had a place for you, but there was not enough money. I told them—they were all old friends—how it stood, and, privately, out of respect to what you've done for your country all these years, they made the money up to fifteen hundred. After the war is over a representation will be made to the authorities for a pension for you, but, even though that may fail, the money will not. That I guarantee. Now, what

room is there for such nonsense as you have in your brain?"

At this Seth smiled sadly, but the expression of his face became firmer than before.

"The thing is where it was, old friend, though you shame me more than I thought was possible."

"Pshaw! I did not do it for you. But what more do you want?"

"Her love," Seth cried with sudden fierceness. "I know as well—better than you—that she will marry me. But why? Because she has promised, and will not break her word. I will not have that, I tell you."

"That cannot be all."

"It is. If you doubt it, ask her yourself."

"God forbid!"

But Seth took his hand and pressed it hard.

"John, old friend—*her* friend who has never failed her yet—stand by her and by me. Heaven knows we need it sorely enough."

John faltered for the first time, and turned away.

"What do you want me to do?"

"Take a letter to Jean."

He made an emphatic motion of dissent.

"Wait till I have finished," Seth went on. "If you will do it, I promise to stay here and see her again. If you won't go, then I am off to the front to-night, I swear I am!"

John set his teeth.

"You would desert Jean and spoil her life?"

"I will set her free and spoil my own. But this is foolishness. I know she does not care for me, so

my mind is fixed. But if you will take a letter I'll remain here till you get back, and give it another chance. If you do not, I shall not write until I am with the boys."

They looked one another in the eyes and did not speak for a minute.

"Is there no other way?" John groaned at last.

"None, so help me God!"

"If I go, you promise to see her?"

"Yes."

"Well, come, then."

They walked to the house, passed Mrs. Burletson to her great surprise without a word, went to the study, and shut the door. A few minutes later John came out alone.

"Mother, I am going to ride to town. Seth will remain till I return. I shall take Black Warrior, so I shall not be long. You shall hear all by-and-bye."

He kissed her and hurried away. The horse was a thoroughbred, and Chippewa was reached in six minutes. But though Black Warrior was in a lather and had covered his rider with flecks of foam, John was as pale as when he left the farm. He gave his horse to a boy at the store, walked to the private door without a word of greeting to any one, and stood in the kitchen face to face with Jean.

"Seth is well," he said quickly, as she started up. "Allow me to shut that door." He did so, Jean watching him with wondering eyes.

"I have brought you this letter. Read it, please, then we can talk."

He gave her the note and went to the window.

He heard the rustle of paper. She had read it. The blow had fallen. With an effort he turned to look at her. She was standing, as if in a dream, looking into the fire, the letter in her hand, neatly folded. John breathed heavily a moment and then spoke with difficulty. Her silence oppressed him.

"I will go now and bring him to you."

She looked up at the words.

"Wait, please. I want to think a moment. Why did he not come himself?"

"He is crazed just now with the morbid fancy that you do not care. You know why I came instead?"

John asked the question sharply.

"Seth doesn't tell me."

"He might have done so, I think," John said, with a touch of bitterness. "I came, because otherwise he would have left Chippewa without seeing you at all."

She looked up with a quick, questioning glance, but she did not speak.

"I could not allow that," John went on huskily. "It is just some fever in his blood. He loves you dearly all the time."

"You are very good to Seth."

"I did not do it," he said coldly, "for Seth's sake."

She turned from him, so that he could not see her face.

"It was very kind and thoughtful of you. I will write to him. He must certainly come and see me before he goes."

She went to a side-table and wrote a few words, and came back. John took the note mechanically.

"I want to ask you something," he said, the words coming out one by one, as if against his will. "I have no right—but we are old friends, you and I. Do you—don't you—love this man?"

"No," she answered gravely, "not as he loves me."

"Then he was right, after all."

"What did he say?"

"That you would have married him because you promised, but that—that you did not care—enough."

"That is true," she paused, then went on hurriedly: "I thought I was right to keep my promise to him. Now I see that I was very wrong. But he was poor and lonely. It seemed so hard, so cruel, to give him up after he had waited all these years. Yet it was not right. It was unjust to him and to—to myself. I can see it now."

She moved away to put the ink and pen into their places. John stood and watched her, and then all at once he realized why Seth had made him come. It was absurd—it was impossible—yet his head reeled with the thought.

"Good-bye, Jean."

"Good-bye."

She gave him her hand, and, as John's closed upon it, all the passionate love and yearning that he had held down so long swelled up in his heart and clamoured to be heard; he tried to be loyal to Seth, but it would not go. He went to the door and turned the

handle, then he closed it again, came back, and took her hands.

.
At the farm the minutes came and went, and an hour passed before the black horse returned. Mrs. Burletson met John at the front door.

“Seth in the study, mother?”

“Yes, but what has happened? Quick, tell me, John.”

He kissed her lovingly.

“I will very soon, but I must go to Seth.”

Seth, however, was already there. A glance at John's face told him all, and taking John affectionately by the arm, he turned to Mrs. Burletson.

“Congratulate me. Up to this morning I owed your son more than any man ever owed another. Now the first instalment of the debt is paid.—John, old friend, I shall write to the President to-day and tell him that the boy who picked the apple did not get it, after all.”

THE END.

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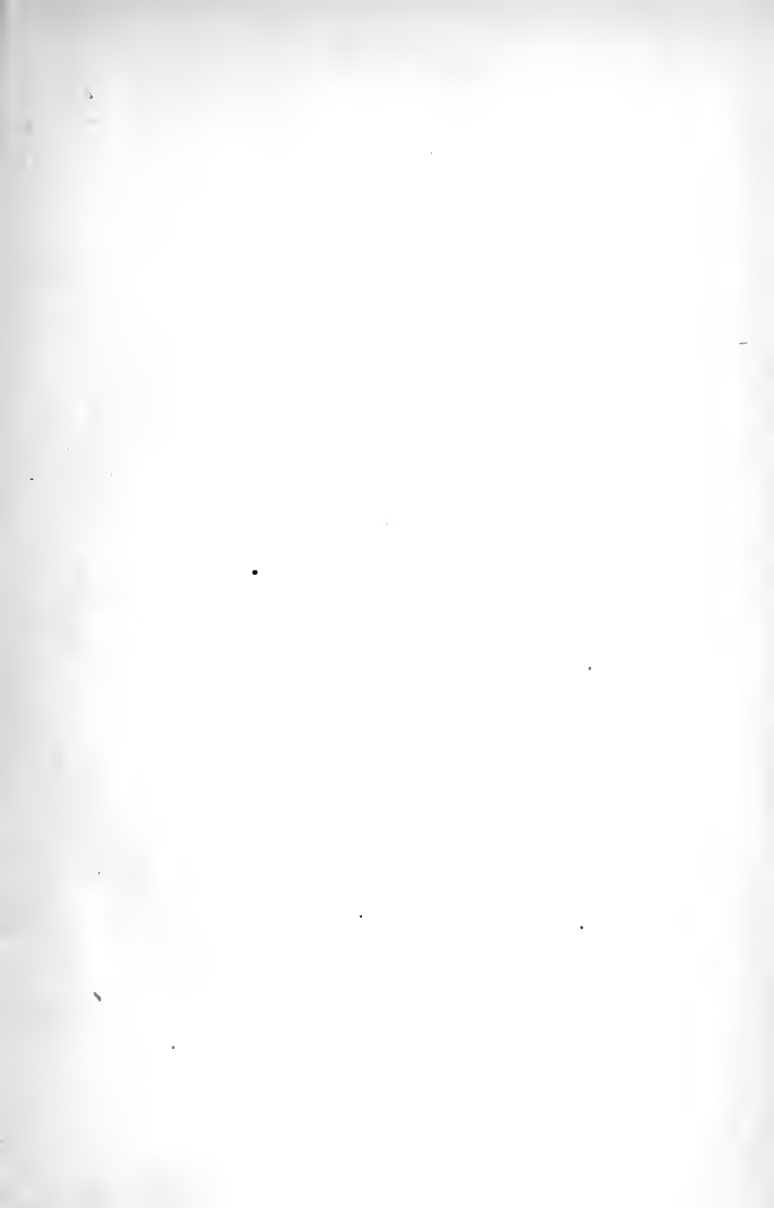
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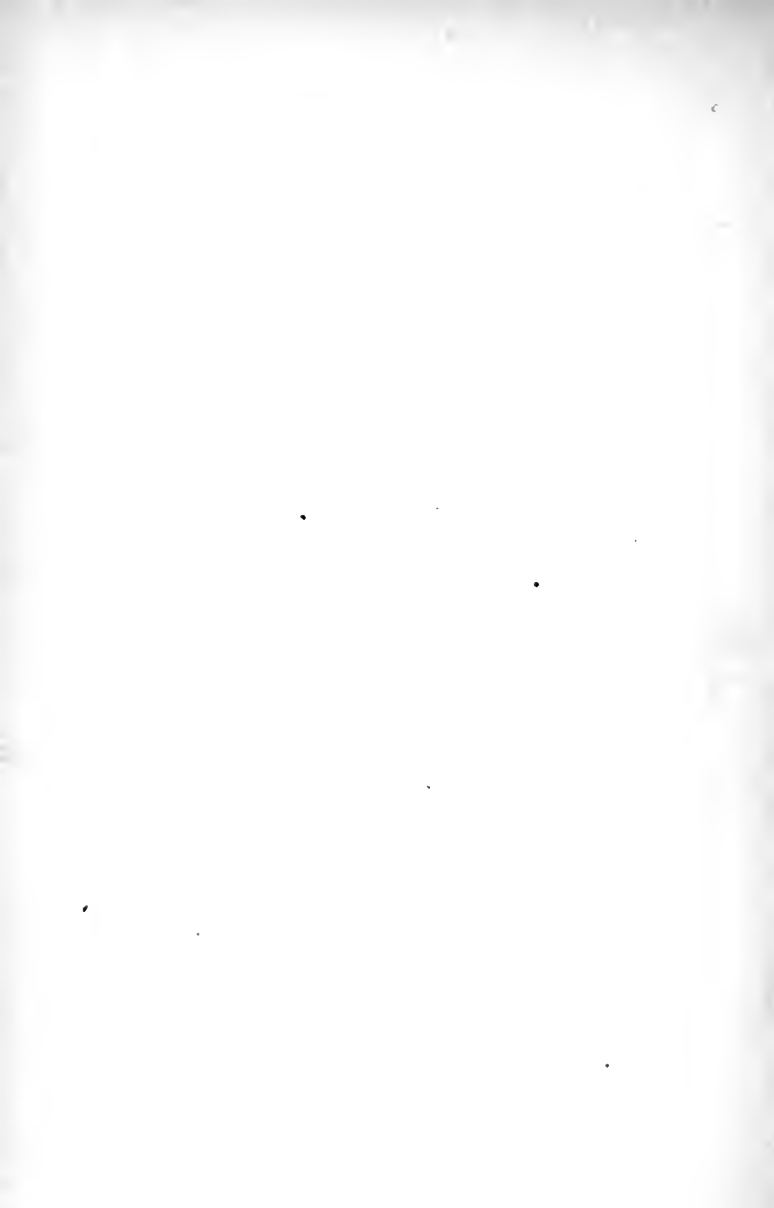
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